

HOMEPLACE: UNEARTHING AND TRACING THE ORAL  
TRADITIONS AND SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGE OF A  
MULTIGENERATIONAL WOMAN-CENTERED  
AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of my research study was to examine the resistance approaches African American families used to connect members and groups to the historical struggle for equality in the United States. As the researcher, utilizing a bounded case study in “writing lives” of my ancestral grandmothers and their *homeplaces*, I used a collection of intergenerational stories provided by family members, that I believe will be a model for Black families to write about their family histories in the future.

The act of writing the lives of my ancestral grandmothers and my family honors the nameless [females] while it encourages other generations to write for self-knowledge, empowerment, and posterity. Thus, the study connects work of the last century about the distinctive cultural practices of African American families that aims to prepare individuals to effectively resist, cope with, and combat White racism to more contemporary issues in the 21st century. In the study, various scholarly arguments exhibit the complexity of the changing dynamics of African American families. I, as educational researcher, bring my research to show practices such as *pedagogies of the Black home* to reflect cultural paradigms which emphasized cultural solidarity, education for self-reliance in Black communities, and alternative families’ lifestyles.

This book is dedicated  
to my sister  
Bernice “Peaches” Elaine Cross  
who was my constant  
companion in those years  
of our childhood and young adulthood and  
whose spirit continues to exist daily in my life  
as a source that nurtures  
my soul . . .  
I sorely miss you Peach!

To my Mother and Grandmothers  
and to the women of the Newton family  
who kept our family alive  
through the oral tradition of stories and storytelling.  
I hope that I have made you just as proud as you  
have made me over the years.

To the memory of my father, James Cross and the Cross Clan...

To my son, Ronald, for all of your advice, support, and dedication to my project. When I began this journey 15 years ago, you were departing college and were instrumental in advising me about navigating academia. Unbeknownst to me at the time was the idea that I would embark on a journey to achieve my Ph.D. The sacrifices that I have made crystallized through your appearances in my academic life – that is, son, you were always there to pick up the pieces, shovel funds, provide socialization and impart your pieces of youthful wisdom. I appreciate all that you do for me, son, and hope that as your role model, this dissertation will continue to inspire you to be the best that you can be and will act as a living legacy in your life.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*I think our family was brave with all that they went through...Jim Crow<sup>1</sup> and all. Despite all of this, they still stuck together. The family was strong inspite of what went on. Our Grandmothers were Women Warriors. Our family took a whipping and still kept up together. Our Grandmothers were brave women; they kept the family together.*  
— Viola Newton

My grandmothers were strong.  
They followed plows and bent to toil.  
They moved through fields sowing seed.  
They touched earth and grain grew.  
They were full of sturdiness and singing.  
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories  
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay  
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands  
They have many clean words to say.  
My grandmothers were strong.  
Why am I not as they?  
Margaret Walker, “Lineage”

#### *The Study: Giving Rise to the Black Female Voice*

I begin the study with the voice of my maternal second cousin, Viola Jackson.

Her voice parallels many of the themes in the poet, Margaret Walker’s, 1989 poem.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Crow laws legally enforced racial segregation in the U.S. South after the Civil War from the Reconstruction period (1877) to the beginning Civil Rights Movement (1930s). “Jim Crow” was the name of a minstrel routine.

Viola's narrative symbolizes and, indeed embodies my ancestors, who directly and indirectly form the core and focus of this inquiry. Viola's stories, I am convinced, are not only critical to understanding the centrality of the oral tradition in Black<sup>2</sup> family culture, but they also, I argue, provide valuable insights into how, for African Americans, such stories, both telling them and hearing them, function as a venue of Black racial socialization. Through Black racial socialization, African Americans learn how to effectively cope with White supremacy<sup>3</sup> in public schools and other important social institutions and spaces. Stories become protective mechanisms that help African American students achieve various forms of success, both inside and outside the home. Specifically, as a result of hearing such stories, African Americans learn strategies necessary for surviving and coping with the ideologies of White superiority they are likely to encounter, not solely in school but also in the larger society.

Thus, the above-mentioned excerpt gives voice to my ancestors – my maternal grandmothers. It represents the oral historical narratives of my ancestral maternal grandmothers' life stories of 7 generations of Black women-centered households. Like hooks' homeplace, although men cohabitated in the Newton households, the stories passed down from one generation to the next were transmitted by the females in the

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<sup>2</sup> The terms Blacks and African American are used interchangeably. When I quote someone who uses Black or African American, the term will be used in that context; otherwise the term Black or Black Americans will be used. I capitalize Black throughout this research, not only because Black is descriptive, but also because it is political (Madhubuti, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> *White supremacy*, the belief that white people are racially superior to others and should therefore dominate society, (<http://www.answers.com/topic/white-supremacy>) and *dominant society* are used interchangeably. The term describes the predominant situation in the U.S. context and connects the relationship between power and institutionalization, even though statistics such as, the Latino/a population is fastly increasing power in this country is still majority White-based.

family. The stories of my grandmothers are not only critical to understanding knowledge production in African American families, but also they support the realization of the family's *homeplace*, *pedagogies of the Black home*, and the African American race socialization process at a site outside of formal educational institutions. Similar to womanist theologian Katie Cannon's experiences, my maternal grandmothers' narratives are "the soil where my inheritance from my [ancestral] mothers' garden grew" (Cannon, 1995, p. 28). Therefore, the centrality of this study is the female voice and through it, I will examine my maternal grandmothers' oral traditions as a way of unpacking their subjugated knowledge and critical social thought, particularly with regards to how such knowledge provided a bulwark of resistance and enduring strength against the interlocking matrix of domination of race, class, gender, and sexuality across time in the U.S. context.

Indeed, African American women, such as my grandmothers, who reside "outside of academia, have long functioned as intellectuals by representing the interests of Black women [and families as a whole]" (Collins, 2000, p. 16). Consequently, their oral histories reveal the importance of storytelling as a way of giving rise to an epistemological knowledge producing system that speaks to the particular lived experiences and "specialized knowledge" of African American families in the U.S. context (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1990; Hughes, 2006; Phillips, 2006). Oral narratives teach Black people coping strategies (among other things) necessary to survive in a White supremacist society. I argue that one of the significant responsibilities that U.S. Black intergenerational grandmothers played was in the Black race socialization process of the family. These women kept in their memories the history and the traditions of their



families. They were the living encyclopedias, if you will, of the Black family unit. Descendants of African American slaves, such as my maternal grandmothers, told oral narratives because they were “the indispensable source of Black people’s historical confidence and spiritual persistence despite all oppression,” argues womanist theologian Katie Cannon (1995, p. 28). With that said, the key constructs I will research in this study are the oral stories, homeplace, and African American family reunions.

Generations of African Americans past and present have been challenged with the experiences of racism, just as my ancestors experienced. The general knowledge that is part of a contemporary Black consciousness include, for example, that one in three African American men today are part of the prison system; Black children are 400 times more likely than White children to be taken out of the home and raised in an institutionalized setting of care; Blacks are more likely to be on death row, under educated, and under employed (Fernandez, Bebon, Messam, & Stepick, 1998; hooks, 1995; West, 1993).

Herein lies the importance of Viola’s story, her lived experiences during the Jim Crow era of the legally segregated South are representative of the intergenerational knowledge in the Newton family stories. Significantly, Viola named our grandmothers Women Warriors<sup>4</sup>, to indicate their resilience and overt and covert resistance to racism. Daily, Viola informs, these women were anything but passive. As warriors they met head

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<sup>4</sup> Ironically, Viola’s term “Woman Warriors” is not related to the book/memoir by Maxine Hong Kingston titled, “Woman Warriors: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.” Kingston’s title “Woman Warriors” references a family of multigenerational Chinese women. Although Viola’s narratives referenced multigenerations of an African American family, she was unfamiliar with Kingston’s work at this time. Viola’s narrative, “Woman Warriors,” is a metaphor within the idea of homeplace and utilized in this study about the oral tradition, the black family and its homeplaces.

on and contested the mental and physical oppressions of race, class, and gender in the world in which they lived. Despite the appearance of their lived lives in a world that acted upon them as passive objects, Viola's narrative demonstrates the complex world they created for themselves as agents who defined their own subjectivity. That theirs was a women-centered household juxtaposed against a racially hostile environment where Black women survived nonetheless clearly suggests that they lived empowered, not disempowered lives.

This proposed study is concerned with the stories and "place-making" practices (Haymes, 1995) transmitted and enacted within African American families as part of the ongoing individual and collective struggle for Black liberation and survival within the deeply historical anti-Black context of U.S. society (Haymes, 1995; Hughes, 2006, 2005). Family stories carry knowledge and strategies for resisting and overcoming White supremacy (hooks, 1990). Providing perspectives of decolonization and patterns of thinking alternative to the deficiency-based understandings of U.S. society's dominant White mainstream, these stories also reflect "specific examples of local resistance" (Baker, 1997, p. ) and analyses of the myths and images associated with Black families, urban life, and processes of gentrification (Jayanandhan, 2009). Families transmit stories from one generation to another through race socialization (Walker, 1987; hooks, 1990; Thornton, 1997) and "place-making practices" (Haymes, 1995) such as the family reunion and Sunday dinners at grandmother's house. These cultural practices show the relationship between the Black struggle for liberation and how the politics of location impact individuals and families.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with members from three generations of the Newton family, this proposed study identifies and analyzes themes in the Newton family's first person accounts of the historical and contemporary perspectives of an African American family struggling to thrive over time while struggling against White racism. The purpose of this study is to examine how the resistance approaches of Black families connect members and groups to the historical struggle for equality for African Americans. Much has been written about the debilitating effects of racism on African American youth, families, and communities (Haymes, 1995; Hughes, 2006; hooks, 1990). Less examined, however, are the distinctive cultural practices of African American families aimed at preparing individuals to effectively resist, cope with, and combat White racism (Hale, 1982).

The significance of the study is that it moves away from deficit models, is not psychologically based and centered on identity, but instead it reveals and centers specific Black racial socialization processes across group experiences (i.e., African and African Americans in the United States). The study utilizes the humanities, specifically literature, to illustrate actual imagery of Black racial socialization. In other words, literature shows the audience what racial socialization looks like. Most importantly, the intent of the study is to assist contemporary Black families to set up strategies for coping with racism, to help Blacks to rethink the public spaces they inhabit by pointing to White ideologies and its impact on them. Albeit this perspective is not new since Black families and communities have always created counter-spaces, having been left out of public participation, however, it [the study] is geared for ordinary, everyday Blacks with the intent of raising their consciousness about the legacy and power of African-centered

practices that are vital to Black existence. This study contributes to the less researched studies of how African Americans accomplish the feat of creating counter-spaces. As a qualitative study, it utilizes rich descriptions from African American novels, racial socialization and Black family reunion literatures to illustrate specifically how, why, and when race socializing practices are utilized. Importantly, this study redresses and re-conceptualizes the sociocultural practices as critical to the survival of contemporary African American families. The reconceptualization is relational to the legacy of Black cultural processes. As an instrumental case, this study attempts to provide insight and connect White supremacist practices to the struggle for equality for African Americans. I use the following theoretical lenses in the study: Black feminist and womanist thought theories (Collins, 2000; Phillips, 2006), Haymes' (1995) notion about a *pedagogy of place* for the Black urban struggle and Hughes' (2006) conceptualization of *Black family pedagogy*. And lastly, hooks' (1990) idea of *homeplace* examines the resistance approaches Black families utilize to thwart racism through the practice of family reunions. Identified below are the study's questions that guide this research. Hence, the empowerment of individuals and families through knowledge production, culture, and genealogy (seen particularly at family reunions) begins to produce the knowledge necessary to transform U.S. Black society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Why the push for family reunions as homeplaces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Answer: Recapturing our homeplaces and countering the loss of Black family values is the study's goal. Homeplace was the site of resistance where counterstories were told by the *Elders* that disrupted mainstream stereotypes and myths about African American families and preserved African American culture. Thus, the findings of the study revealed what I call the *three Rs*: resilience,

resistance and reconciliation which are detailed in Chapter 7, and I argue are a re-articulation of African American family values for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Significance of the Study*

This research is important, because it provided new scholarship about how the African American family reconstructs its own narratives and reconstitutes itself historically within the homeplace. Revealed in the study is my conceptualization of *pedagogies of the Black home* that I argued is a *system of knowledge* like Black family reunions, a safe place and space where intergenerational knowledge is produced. Also, I argued that grandma's house and/or Black family reunions are sites of resistance (hooks, 1990; Haymes, 1995). Most importantly, these sites of informal education foster cultural identity under the guise of history or tradition. Given this, *grandma's house* and/or the Black family reunion is transformative and becomes in and of itself a site of empowerment, validation, and adulation.

Secondly, reunions provided Black families with vital tools through intergenerational knowledge production of family stories to navigate the impacts of White supremacy. This area of research is a critical element, because it examined the effects of *Black family pedagogies* on African Americans through counter-narratives that provided Black families the racial resiliency and coping strategies to navigate within oppressive spaces in U. S. educational systems and the society-at-large in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Questions*

The following research questions will guide my study:

1. How does the signifier of *homeplace* shift in the Newton family?
  - a. What tensions/differences exist between the *Ancestors*, *Elders*, *Offspring* and *Youngsters*?
  - b. How are these tensions reconciled by the *Youngsters* through the values, beliefs and traditions within the family?
2. What purpose does the reunion serve in the lives of the Newton family?
  - a. What are the stories that foster family youth with racial socialization and internalization, and cultural values at the reunion, within the home and in the community?

### *The Organization of the Study*

The following is the study's organization:

Chapter 1 introduces the personal experiences of my ancestral grandmothers and illustrates the experiences of the *Elders* who lived below the Mason-Dixon Line along with their warrior spirit, resiliency and resistance to White supremacy in the Jim Crow era.

Chapter 2 details the function of the theoretical frameworks utilized in the study and demonstrates not only the importance of various lenses in theorizing, but also shows the complexities surrounding pedagogical spaces in African American homeplaces, at family reunions and in the community.

Chapter 3 introduces a review of the literature that serves as the driving force of the study. The literature is positioned in the study to illustrate much of the cultural workings of African Americans by focusing on the cultural practices found in the literature. In other words, through literature we experience the racial socialization practices that occurred in Black families. Thus, literature illustrates what racial socialization looks like in African American families. Research shows that qualitative studies in most cases draw from two sources to understand Black families: 1) social sciences, and 2) literature/fiction.

Chapter 4 presents the study's methodology. The chapter begins with my positionality. Discussions center on reflections about the writing process and the tensions surrounding family roles, challenges of researching and analyzing one's own data, and my struggle with how to analyze my own family. When the family is the subject of a dissertation project, what issues do you expose? Which are omitted? Of major concern, here, are the silences within the family. Through a case study method, integration of oral histories and stories are used to construct narratives about the participants. Included also in this chapter are adult and junior protocols used to guide the participants' input during two focus groups and various personal and telephone interviews. Chapter 4 briefly introduces the participants through full and rich descriptions. Lastly, Chapter 4 returns to the issues surrounding the positionality of the researcher to re-articulate the difficulty in dealing with the issues of subjectivity and validity in the study.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Black feminist and womanist thought theories (BFW) were employed to frame the narratives of the participants. Chapter 5 entitled, *Homeplace: Safe Spaces in Unsafe Times* reveals how the signifier of *homeplace* within

the Newton family evolves through time. Here, I pull in literature and poetry that address pedagogies that function as specific practices the Newton family conceptualizes through pedagogical spaces such as *grandma's house* and *Black family reunions*.

Chapter 6 entitled, *Black Family Reunions: A Place for Racial Socialization* introduces discussions of the stories that center family reunions. Through telephone conversations and discussion of the Newton family stories from various family reunions, what emerges is the Newton family “doing racial socialization”. Ultimately, the connections between family relationships, practices – i.e., teaching and learning – emerge as a way in which many African American families like the Newton’s construct “place-making” practices as pedagogical spaces such as reunions that foster learning environments.

Lastly, Chapter 7 presents a discussion of the findings, which connect the themes that emerge from the data. As the concluding chapter, it centers the summarizations of what I call the *three Rs* – characteristics of African American families: resistance, resiliency and reconciliation. The chapter reviews the strategies and techniques Black families use to resist the dominant culture theorized by hooks and other scholars. It [the chapter] speaks to the issue of resiliency and how the fore-strength of the Black women and the African American community provided strength in the way of faith, hopefulness, pride, stick-tuitiveness and love of self and family. All of these strengths are rooted in *spirituality* surfacing in the study through the utilization of the tenets of BFW. Lastly, the chapter discusses the notion of reconciliation in terms of how families navigate issues surrounding generational conflicts – i.e., tensions that exist between generations. The chapter sheds light on how the *Youngsters* understand and navigate the intergenerational



versus intragenerational dynamics of the Newton family that on occasion do not align with the values and traditions of the older generations. Also, Chapter 7 reports the findings, and suggests recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

#### *The Function of Theories, Pedagogies, and Lenses*

The objectives in this chapter are to describe the theoretical frameworks I used in this study. First, I describe the core theories of Black feminist thought and womanist theories by explaining their functions in the study. Secondly, in order to develop the framework further, I explore several pedagogies that explore the idea of place, struggle, hope and spirituality experienced in the lives of many African American families. From this emerges my extension, *pedagogies of the Black home*, a reconceptualization of Black family pedagogy. Thirdly, I explore the lens of *homeplace* through first-persons narratives, many of which are oral stories, family histories and literature citing a range of scholars on the subject that, in essence, problematizes the knowledge production process of Black families. In particular, the African American *homeplace* is related to and located in the pedagogical spaces where assumed knowledge or truths are interrogated in this study.

#### *Black Feminist and Womanist Thought Theories (BFW)*

Theories are ideas or concepts that are used to structure the dissertation and provide a framework to understand its interpretations of the research, data, analysis and conclusions. The theories used to develop the theoretical framework for this dissertation

include a bricolage or a synthesis of combined contextual frameworks (Danley, 2003), namely, Black feminist (Collins, 2000) and womanist (Phillips, 2006) thought theories for which I use the acronym BFW (Black Feminist/Womanist).

Pedagogy, a method of teaching, enables an understanding of a particular topic that allows the production of knowledge to pass through the generations. A *pedagogy of place* (Haymes, 1995), *Black family pedagogy* (Hughes, 2006), and my extension of Hughes' scholarship that I call *pedagogies of the Black home* – all were utilized to give respect and voice to the lived experiences of my grandmothers and mother and to look at a multigenerational, woman-centered African American family. In addition, *homeplace* and *Black family reunions* are theorized within this section to further provide an argument about pedagogical sites or spaces for teaching and learning – i.e., lessons learned in the home. Within a BFW framework, oral histories and stories are central to the study, because they represent Black women's standpoints such as *grandma's house* that are validated within African American communities. The oral stories in the study connect to the following tenets of BFW: 1) lived experience as a criterion of meaning, 2) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, 3) the ethics of caring, 4) the ethic of personal accountability, and 5) Black women as agents of knowledge utilizing resistance techniques that describe the unearthing of African American women's subjugated knowledge. According to Patricia Hill Collins (1990),

The centrality of women in African American extended families reflects both a continuation of African-derived cultural sensibilities ... Women's centrality is characterized less by the *absence* of husbands and fathers than by the significance of women. Though men may be physically present or have well-defined and culturally significant roles in the extended family, the kin unit tends to be woman-centered. Bebe Moore Campbell's (1989) parents separated when she was small. Even though she spent the school year in the North Philadelphia household maintained by her grandmother and mother, Campbell's father assumed an

important role in her life...In woman-centered kin units such as Campbell's – whether a mother-child household unit, a married couple household, or a larger unit extending over several households –the centrality of mothers is not predicated on male powerlessness (Tanner 1974, 133)...Organized, resilient, women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers are key in understanding this centrality. Grandmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins act as othermothers by taking on child-care responsibilities for one another's children. (p. 178)

Othermothering is essentially part of Black women's standpoint on mothering and is relational to the ethics of caring and the ethic of personal accountability. Stanlie M. James (1993), professor and scholar, illustrates the notion of othermothering and the relationship to its roots in West Africa. James tells the story that her child, grieving over the death of her grandmother was "othermothered" by a "neglected child" who was othermothered by this same grandmother. According to James,

"Othermothered" by my grandmother, she had become an informally adopted member of our network of fictive kin. It had been my grandmother's simple belief that all children must be fed, clothed and sent to school. If for some reason their biological parents were unable or unwilling to discharge these obligations, then it was incumbent upon some other member of the community to accept that responsibility. This fictive kin who stepped in to counsel my daughter was upholding a family tradition that had been modeled by my grandmother some fifty years before. (p. 44)

Collins (2000) citing Troester (1984) below sheds light on the subject, also:

In many African American communities, fluid and changing boundaries often distinguish biological mothers from other women who care for children. Biological mothers, or bloodmothers, are expected to care for their children. But African and African American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers – women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities – traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood.

In a similar context, womanist scholar Layli Phillips, author and editor of *The Womanist Reader* discusses the interchanging meaning of Black feminism and womanism. She uses Sheared's (1994) definition of womanist (cited in Williams, 1990, p. 70) as:

... an understanding of race, gender, and class that is grounded in “a commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire people – men and women – as well as valoration of women’s works in all their varieties and multitudes.” (p. 272)

From Phillips five characteristics of womanism, three are relevant theories of womanism: vernacular, communitarian, and spiritualized. In the case of othermothering, the notion of communitarian is particularly relevant. Communitarianism is the idea that social change is a state of collective well-being for every member of the community (p. xxv). On the one hand, Collins asserts that Black women’s knowledge (delineated through the *matrix of domination*<sup>5</sup> – race, class, gender, and sexuality) is situated on two levels: one as a standpoint based on the everyday knowledge of ordinary women, and two as specialized knowledge of Black women experts that articulate “collective” experiences within paradigms of Black feminist/womanist epistemologies. On the other hand, however, Phillips views a womanist frame as a social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and methods of problem-solving concerned with ending all forms of oppression for all people.

Womanists and Black feminists such as Walker (1987), hooks (1990), Collins (2000) and Phillips (2006) utilize, in part, oral stories that fit within the notion of what I argue are *pedagogies of the Black home*. These pedagogies validate the characteristics, beliefs, values, wisdoms, and the spirituality of African American culture. As such, the protective functions of oral stories act as racial socialization systems that I argue may

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<sup>5</sup> *Matrix of domination* refers to how intersecting oppressions are organized. It describes the overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained. In the United States, such domination has occurred through schools, housing, employment, government, and other social institutions that regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions which take on historically specific forms that change in response to human actions – racial segregation persists, but not in the forms that it took in prior historical eras – so the shape of domination itself changes (Collins, 2000, pp. 18, 227-228).

contribute to increased learning and assist in fostering educational success in the schools. For example, we can better understand the complexity of women-centered households as more than a form of survival by considering how their technique is or was epistemological in nature since it depended upon womanist sensibilities as an important way of knowing. Ladson-Billings (2000) defines “epistemology” as more than a “way of knowing” but rather a “system of knowing” exemplified by “internal logic” and “external validity” both of which are linked closely to an African/African American “worldview” (pp. 25-26). She distinguishes between the concepts of “knowledge” and “wisdom,” thereby expanding the spectrum of the complexity surrounding African-centered knowledge production.

Considering such important differences and unique qualities, Collins (1998) argues that these qualities demand “specialized knowledge” as illustrated in African-centered epistemologies (p. 257). The significance of orality then to African American culture offers an excellent example. Orality, in part, is one of several African cultural survivals that continue to center the lives of African Americans. Orality places the *Elders* or “*griot*”<sup>6</sup> (King, 1976), literally a family oral historian, at the center of Black culture or families as holders of wisdom passed down intergenerationally through the vehicle of “oral stories or storytelling.” As Ladson-Billings points out, in contrast, from a European perspective the oral tradition is viewed merely as “folkloric” and therefore devalued. Stated differently, a valued genre in African American culture – one that literally stands at the nucleus of who they are, is devalued and mythologized in Western culture. Given

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<sup>6</sup> In traditional African culture, the griot’s sole purpose is to revitalize the history or “keep it alive” by telling and re-telling the stories about the villages and homelands of Africa that speak to the Black existence.

these radically different perspectives, the need clearly exists for counter-hegemonic systems that employ the power a tight African American family unit yields.

### *Pedagogies of Place*

The inner city communities combat the segregated space of ethnic fragmentation, cultural strangeness, and economic overexploitation of the new post-industrial city with the defense of their identity, the preservation of their culture, the search for their roots, and the marking out of their newly acquired territory. Sometimes, also, they display their rage, and attempt to devastate the institutions that they believe devastate their daily lives. (Castells, 1983:317)

Haymes' (1995) work draws on critical pedagogy and is one of the lenses that I use to interrogate Black racial socialization. Citing Castells above, Haymes calls on African Americans to use "critical pedagogy as a tool to reclaim memory" in order to develop counter-public spheres of resistance to attain social transformation. Part of the process of racial socialization utilized by *pedagogies of the Black home*, draws on Haymes' contention that Blacks must resist White supremacy "by constructing alternative images and representations of place" (p. 9). The impetus of city life impacts every aspect of Black civil society. So then, how does the Black community resist White supremacy and reclaim the meaning of their lives? The answer according to Haymes (1995) lies in their understanding that a politics of location exists that directly impacts them. Toward that end, Haymes introduces a concept called *pedagogy of place* – a pedagogy to support the Black urban struggle. Jayanandhan (2009) utilizes Haymes' scholarship in the following excerpt:

"...Pedagogies of place foreground the role of power in defining and creating place and adopt a critical framework that prepares the disenfranchised to seek, create, and use place as a tool for resistance."

In other words, acknowledging White supremacy necessitates that African Americans understand and “address the relationship between urban struggles and the production of urban meanings” (p. 109). Haymes (1995) draws from the work of cultural critics such as bell hooks to develop a “pedagogy of place” that connects community life to social struggle and resistance. All of which I envision as a space for the homeplace and/or Black family reunion.

### *Black Family Pedagogy*

Sherick Hughes’ (2006) *Black Hands in the Biscuits Not in the Classroom: Unveiling Hope in a Struggle for Brown’s Promise* presents another lens, called “Black Family Pedagogy,” through which I examine racial socialization. Hughes argues that “Black family pedagogy” is an integral part of educating the masses about the racist agenda of White supremacy from the Jim Crow past. Hughes narrates “a story of struggle and hope in the aftermath of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954). His central thesis highlights the interplay of struggle and hope in family pedagogy – oral stories that are first-person family experiences of the Black struggle, particularly as it relates to desegregation. The participant families in Hughes’ book recall the desegregation of the northern Albemarle schools in North Carolina, the burning crosses of the Klu Klux Klan on the lawns of the prospective students who will integrate White schools, usage of racial slurs by Whites in the area, and the inspiration held by African Americans about what the desegregated school movement promised. Hughes’ quotes one of his participants, Dora Erskin’s “story of a conversation with her employer” to communicate the frustration of many individuals about racism:



I did tell the White lady that I was working for, I told her, I said, “Your husband’s daddy, the granddaddy, took the children out of northeast Albemarle public school and put them in private schools, so the children wouldn’t be in the schools with the Blacks.” I told her, I said, “Well, he come here and sit down to the table and eat,” I said. “My Black hands are in his biscuits. He eats them.” I said, “What’s the difference?” She said, “Tell him that.” I said, “No, I’m not going to.” I said, “You tell him.” [laughter] I said, “You tell him.” She said, “I will.” I believe she will if it ever came up. She didn’t like him either. No sir. He’s sitting down and eating my food. I said, “My Black hands are in his biscuits, and he’ll eat them, but he didn’t want his grandchildren to mix with the Blacks.” (pp. 2-3)

Hughes connects the notions surrounding racism, segregation, and the desegregation of public schools. He further advances a thesis that after *Brown* and during the integration of public schools “the loss of Black teachers affected the job market for local Blacks but also negatively shaped dynamics of student-teacher relationships.” Thus, with school integration surfaced the loss of control by Black residents in northeastern Albemarle and “an increasingly White-dominated educational system” (Pearson, 2008, p. 6). These are examples of the oral stories that Hughes centers about the Black struggle in order to present narratives of hope and faith. They are oral stories about families “pushing their children to be strong, have faith, and succeed against all odds” in light of the promise of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*.

Hughes’ (2006) term “Black family pedagogy” draws on Hill-Collins’ (1990) notion of oppression and the matrix of domination (i.e., race, class and gender) coupled with his (Hughes, 2005) conceptualization of oppressed family pedagogy (OFP). OFP “involves the intergenerational art of critical and reciprocal teaching and learning” that occurs in the home “by families battling oppression” (p. 53). According to Hughes (2006), “narratives of oppressed families are educative and indeed, pedagogical (Hughes, 2005b) in ways that expose and resist the matrix of domination at home that inspire hope for their struggle” (Hughes, 2005). He contends that OFP is “based in family narratives”

and potentially can produce evidence such as counter-stories (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

Hughes renders Black family pedagogy as a useful tool of critical pedagogy since it supports “Black family teaching and learning settings as sites that epitomize a critical pedagogy of the oppressed” (Hughes, 2005, p. 52). Citing Clark (2002, pp. 91, 94, 95), Hughes writes:

1. Oppressed family pedagogy can restore the subject to history by documenting the history of communities that have been excluded from historic accounts and encouraging individuals to see themselves as historical actors. It is possible to encourage people to remember as a way of entering and transforming history and our understanding of past k-12 experiences in the present (Noblit & Dempsey, 1996) for future reference.
2. Oppressed family pedagogy can spark a dialogical encounter based on rapport between the researched and the narrator-researcher. It can support healing, reconciliation, and developmental teaching and learning affording...the currency to validate and to exchange important k-12 experiences with the families.
3. Oppressed family pedagogy can work as an artistic practice that can transform relationships and build new cultural perspectives, thereby opening new dialogues to engage positive k-12 home-school-community-university relationships.

The definition of Black family pedagogy is clearly defined in Hughes’ (2006) book, *Black Hands in the Biscuits*, and the work of Black family pedagogy is clearly delineated through the stories of the participants. It is clear from the preliminary research for this study that Black family pedagogy draws on Hughes (2005) earlier work, OFP.

### *Pedagogies of the Black Home: A Reconceptualization*

In this study, I have reconceptualized the term *Black family pedagogy* (in which Hughes’ book centers hope and struggle) to *pedagogies of the Black home*. I argue that through a BFW lens, the reconceptualized term gives voice to the Newton family

narratives because it helps to illuminate the multiple oppressions that Black women, such as my ancestral grandmothers, encountered in the U.S. context (i.e., sociohistorical and cultural) to a 21<sup>st</sup> century context that includes a rearticulation of African/African American family values.

Data sources that are relational to my study can be found within the realm of Chicano/a literature in education that illuminate themes that are referred to as “pedagogies of the home.”<sup>7</sup> It is from this literature that I attempt to develop and re-conceptualize the term *pedagogies of the Black home*. Still, in the Chicano/a literature on “pedagogies of the home” it is argued that people of color believe that being educated is directly derived from family and cultural definitions. For example, Valenzuela (1998) refers to this as *educación*. Valenzuela conceptualizes *educación* as a foundational cultural construct with a particular worldview that is a basic instruction about citizenship. It emphasizes respect, responsibility, and a certain gregariousness. For Valenzuela, *educación* means not only working to capacity in formal educational settings; but also, being respectful, polite, and obedient. Chicano/a children have mutual respect for teachers.

Nieto (2002), on the other hand, makes the argument that the reason for education is much broader and more principled for many students than the conceptualization of formal education and their White teachers. They envision education as a means, for example, to obtain gainful employment. Latinos/as see education as far more important.

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<sup>7</sup> Latina scholar, Valenzuela (1998) terms the education Latino students receive from home as *educacion*. *Education* in Latina/o communities parallel *pedagogies of the Black home* for Black communities, since it gives the lessons we learned from our grandmothers, our aunts/uncles, and extended family an official name.

According to Valdes in *Con Respeto*, Latino/a students expand the notion of *educación* to include what their parents have taught them. For instance, to listen to adults without interrupting them is respectful and part of the family values instilled in them by their parents. This is part of the family socialization that contributes to the success of Latinos/as. Hence, the notion of *educación* children experience at home contributes to successful learning.

Closely related to *pedagogies of the home* are studies that examine womanist pedagogies. For example, Villenas (1996), Delgado Bernal (2001), and Galvan (2001) argue that womanist pedagogies reify “culturally specific ways” of epistemological and pedagogical spaces. Most notably, they provide space for discourses about specific knowledge. Similarly, womanists and Black feminists such as Walker (1987), hooks (1990), and Collins (2000) utilize oral stories that fit within the notion of *pedagogies of the Black home* to validate the characteristics, beliefs, values, wisdoms, and the spirituality of African American culture. I argue that their scholarship is related to *Black family pedagogies*. Thus, my argument to [re]articulate and [re]institute the critical necessity for Black racial socialization practices within African American families in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will assist in buttressing cultural awareness in the community as well as make a unique and original contribution to the field.

Although my reconceptualization of the term *Black family pedagogy* in some ways converges with Hughes (2006) on the basic issues about intergenerational knowledge transmission gained at home, I argue that *pedagogies of the Black home* (my reconceptualized term) is a category that is relational and falls within the realm of *Black family pedagogies*. However, the distinction from Hughes’ conceptualization is that my

term offers a gendered perspective that explores the dynamics of family oral stories, intersects with various oppressions, and is juxtaposed against informal knowledge production processes in the home rather than formal educational processes. Through BFW and particularly its tenets – the criterion of meaning, dialogue to assess knowledge claims, ethics of caring, ethic of personal accountability and Black women acting as agents of knowledge – we begin to ascertain the notion of homeplace and family reunions in African/African American cultures.

Part of the distinction of this new term calls for historical memory as part of the context or contour of this perspective. For example, although Black history is part of the curricula in public schools, in many instances it only becomes visible during specific times of the year and is not integrated throughout the year to benefit students. Thus, this is the place or intersection between reunions and families where *pedagogies of the Black home* become visible and where knowledge is transmitted in the home and augments formal educational systems. Black families begin to ascertain the connections of race and the dominant culture. I argue that *pedagogies of the Black home* is an informal knowledge-based system that critiques Eurocentricism by teaching African American students they must “become twice as good” so that they can “crack the glass ceiling.” hooks (1990) exemplifies this notion in her discussion of grandma’s house as a site of resistance. I also argue that *pedagogies of the Black home* is significant because it will unveil how in previous generations, Black families worked in tandem with other institutions such as the church, community organizations, and educational institutions in efforts to ensure more than adequate academic preparation for African American children to enter formal educational institutions, particularly where Black culture is excluded from

the curricula. I argue that the present-day low statistics of Black children's success rate in the public schools perpetuated by White supremacy (assimilation) is related to the [lack of] Black racial socialization practices. This translates to the poor retention rates and a decline in African Americans receiving high school diplomas, as experienced during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A theoretical conceptualization shows the transformation of Black family knowledge as a foundational element extending from "grandma's house" outwardly to contemporary conceptualizations of Black family reunions, which I argue currently has replaced "grandma's house."

In addition, from the vantage point of how I am conceptualizing *pedagogies of the Black home*, I argue that it functions to counteract stereotypes as it demonstrates through literature explanations about contemporary ideologies of race and racism – all useful in understanding Black family pedagogies. Because images of racism are subtle, many Black children are unable to identify its varied forms (located in assimilationist practices and interspersed in the media, for instance). Thus, it is necessary for contemporary African Americans to become [re]socialized in order to enable them to rearticulate a different view of themselves and their lived experiences (Collins, 2000; Omni & Winant, 1994, p. 99). *Pedagogies of the Black home* as a re-statement of Black race socialization practices and processes in 21<sup>st</sup> century language, connects current generations of African Americans to their past while it reinforces the necessary tools for them to understand the importance of their heritage. At reunions, Black families learn about their ancestors through the process of learning the historical context of their families. This process augments their lives.

Finally, *pedagogies of the Black home* are connected to African American homeplaces and the womanist consciousness because of its inclusion to Black peoples lived experiences. This inquiry is unlike both Haymes (1995) and Hughes' (2005) studies. Whereas, Haymes' study interrogates White supremacist systems at the macro level and Hughes' study examines White structures such as the educational system through the perspective of oral stories of families (macro/microlevels), my study is the intersection between macro- and microlevels used to connect people's individual, daily lives in a collective sense to the micro- and macrosystems of space and/or location specifically at family reunions.

### *The Homeplace*

My findings contested the idea of home as completely safe or unsafe, but rather as a very complex notion. The one consistent thread in my study, however, was my angst during the complete process. As I discussed in the study, I was quite apprehensive about the notion of voice. It made me self-conscious, because I wanted very much to produce a dissertation that was objective as well as subjective. That is, I wanted a dissertation that would make my family proud of the work itself. Also, I wanted a dissertation that was somewhat political in that it would represent all of the strains of the Newton family. However, the problem of being both the researcher and family member made the task even more difficult. The proposal stage of the study showed that the data had not been problematized, namely, because I, as researcher, was very conscious of producing confidential information that was not for public consumption. Like my family, I only centered the positive stories (partly because in many instances, my family did not divulge

negative ones). Once my dissertation committee brought this point to my attention, I then had to re-examine the research data and problematize some of the findings. It was a difficult process; I had to critically engage myself in the themes and look beyond ordinariness. Through these challenges, I was able to identify five themes that were buried in the stories of the Newton Family History Book that I unconsciously discarded because of the negativity. For example, a rupture that divided two sisters' families was a story that I heard many times from my mother. The problem was how to present it without disrespecting the central characters, their immediate family members as well as the offspring in the particular strains of the Newton family? Also, some of my original work – poetry and short stories – were part of the family's history book. How would I analyze them in terms of objectivity? When I wrote the pieces a decade ago, I never dreamed they would end up in my dissertation. As I pondered over these issues, I realized that these themes fit into the idea of homeplace and family reunions and when analyzed, were essentially prescriptions for the lessons one learns when listening to the stories. In fact, I speak to the issue of “airing dirty laundry” and its consequences in the Methods chapter. Although I am not entirely convinced that my decision to utilize this story and the four others (*A Pauper's Funeral*, *Who Said What?* *Where's Pops*, and *Singlehood: Living Alone*), I rationalized that members of the Newton family would indeed benefit from them.

The idea that we are safe in our homeplaces was an assumption in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context the notion of homeplace given complex issues existing in the home looks differently than it did during the Jim Crow era. The very nature of such negative situations such as funerals or miscommunications and arguments



between family members, and issues surrounding a child's abandonment are not only negative, but in a sense could be deemed as unsafe for those family members who are experiencing the situations. In many cases, however, African American families are resilient; family reconciliation negates those negative spaces through resistance where they become positive locations. But maybe, just maybe, when the stories are read or heard or discussed by other family members, then they become a prescription for preventative measures and the end result – the lessons learned – are transformed into positive spaces. This was the process I utilized to problematize some of the data/family narratives about the Newton family. The final analysis produced what I refer to as the three Rs – resistance, resilience and reconciliation which I detail in Chapter 7.

Cultural critic and [Black] feminist scholar bell hooks' (1990) narrative made a profound impression on me when I was first introduced to it during my undergraduate years. It was reminiscent of my family's Sunday dinners and reunions throughout my childhood. I was amazed that the following excerpt from her book, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990) paralleled my Grandma's house:

When I was a young girl the journey across town to my grandmother's house was one of the most intriguing experiences. Mama did not like to stay there long. She did not care for all that loud talk, the talk that was usually about the old days, the way life happened then – who married whom, how and when somebody died, but also how we lived and survived as Black people, how the White folks treated us. I remember this journey because of the oral stories I would hear . . . Oh! That feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming when we finally reached the edges of her yard, when we could see the soot Black face of our grandfather, Daddy Gus, sitting in his chair on the porch, smell his cigar, and rest on his lap. . . I speak of this journey as leading to my grandmother's house, even though our grandfather lived there too. In our young minds houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeling of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we learned dignity, integrity of being; there we learned to have faith. The folks who

made this life, who were our primary guides and teachers, were Black women. (p. 41)

I used a BFW lens to connect the notion of storytelling through hooks' (1990) conceptualization of "homeplace," an important construct to the study, that pulls in the idea of homeplace as a "site of resistance." As a site of resistance, the homeplace is where African Americans could freely confront humanization issues, develop a political consciousness, and resist racist stereotypes and oppression. hooks (1990) insists that in the homeplace, "Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts, despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world" (pp. 171-172). Thus, *homeplace* "provides a framework of resistance efforts that takes place in homes" and to "discuss the development of Black female political consciousness." hooks' (1990) notion of "homeplace" is constructed as a safe place where Blacks affirm each other and heal the wounds inflicted by White supremacy. hooks argues:

We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of White supremacy on the outside; it was there on the inside in that "homeplace," most often created and kept by Black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits. (p.42)

Gieryn provides a theory that teases out the meanings of the homestead and/or homeplace in relationship to the family members that embrace it. Gieryn (2000) identifies three theoretical principles of "homeplace," geographic location, material form, and investment with meaning and value. According to Gieryn, "home, nested in a definable space, is the crucible from which a person's social identity emerges, transforms, and is internalized and sustained over time (p. 170)."

*Homeplace in Black Poetry*

*Diverne's House*

*The house of myth;  
the house that shame built;  
the house given to Diverne.  
The myth of a slave woman  
Who had to be broken, but bore  
Two children, neither Negro  
nor white. The myth  
of their father.*

– Marilyn Nelson Waniek (1990)

*Panola: My Kinfolks' Land Panola.*

*As the toilers laid their tools down for an endless rest.  
It's on this site that my soul breathes to harvest my best.  
For what was planted by those before me will forever stand.  
On this rural countryside called Panola, my kinfolks' land.*

– Evelyn Dilworth-Williams' (2002)

In this section I use poetry as a way to conceptualize homeplace. Marilyn Nelson Waniek (1990) and Evelyn Dilworth-Williams' (2002) excerpts above are an example of ways in which homeplace frequently occurs in the poetry of African Americans and is representative in oral traditions and historical stories that show the importance of homeplaces. Specifically, their poetry functions as a theoretical tool in which to conceptualize homeplace as a safe space for racial socialization.

Poetry as theory demystifies the story of Waniek's ancestral grandmother Diverne's house, where homeplace is the setting in which she weaves a complex story about genealogy, family relations, the injustices of slavery, compassion and dignity. Diverne is the great, great, great grandmother of Waniek. Another example of Waniek's *homeplace*, is seen in her poem, "The House on Moscow Street," where we envision the rituals embodying homeplace:

*It's the ragged source of memory,  
 a tarpaper-shingled bungalow  
 in a weedy ravine Nothing special:  
 a chain of three bedrooms  
 and a long side porch turned parlor  
 where my great-grandfather, Pomp, smoked  
 every evening over the news,  
 a long sunny kitchen  
 where Annie, his wife  
 measured cornmeal  
 dreaming through the window  
 across the ravine and up to Shelby Hill  
 where she had borne their spirited,  
 high-yellow brood...  
 (Waniek, 1990, p. 4)*

Waniek's family history prevails in this verse as she describes the house and introduces issues of socio-economic status and class. Her poetry shows us ordinariness of life such as the daily rituals a person encounters in the homeplace: smoking, preparing meals, and the introduction of the notion "bi-racialness" as the poet discusses forbidden and love relationships, ancestors, and the pride the family has in land ownership. Most importantly, food is a major theme along with loss and the idea of reunification:

*...As much love,  
 As much as a visit  
 To the grave of a known ancestor,  
 The homeplace moves me not to silence  
 But to righteous, praise Jesus song:*

*...Oh, catfish and turnip greens,  
 Hot-water cornbread and grits  
 Oh, musty, much-underlined Bibles;  
 Generations lost to be found,  
 to be found  
 (Waniek, 1990, p. 4)*

Much is learned from Waniek's poem. Not only does it give us a glimpse into the lives of Pomp and Annie's house on Moscow Street, we observe the inner makings of a home as we witness their everyday, ordinary lives. We imagine through the rich, descriptive

narrative the dinner meal of “soul food,” the historical nature of the house as a home, the genealogical link to the ancestors, and the spirituality that drives the family forward.

As I read Evelyn Dilworth-Williams’ (2002) book of poetry, *Panola: My Kinfolks' Land*, it assisted me in recognizing and theorizing why I resonated with and felt a connection to the land. Dilworth-Williams’ descriptive imagery about her homestead *encapsulated and transported me in a time machine to the past – Warsaw, Virginia. I read this book 13 years after my cousin Phyllis and I had visited our ancestral graves at Clarksville Baptist Church, and as I recall, Dilworth-Williams’ poems conjured up wonderful and chilling feelings in me simultaneously.*

Stack (1996) provides an explanation for the nostalgia that many African Americans feel that push them to return to the old homestead. He refers to the act of going back to the family homestead as the “return migration theme” that many African Americans including my family utilize as we go back to the South to reclaim our roots and in doing so, reveal the notion of homeplace as a critical and dynamic developmental process in their lives. Stack explains,

African Americans ... experienced the homeplace as an omnipotent entity. It would send certain family members away in early adulthood and call them back in midlife. The homeplace would hasten some to reclaim their childhood attachment to the land and the rootedness that soil, a family house, or a community cemetery provide. (p. 170-71)

Stack’s theorization is reminiscent in Margaret Walker’s poem *Lineage* at the introduction to the study to demonstrate how we envision the ancestors’ connection to the land and the reader’s connection to the poetry that manifests introspectively. *In my mind Panola, one of the poems in Dilworth-Williams’ book, was nostalgic for me because it lifted my spirit and connected me to my ancestors, the Newton family homestead, and was*

*truly a reclamation of the past. Panola introduced me to the issues of caring, identity and the homeplace.* An example of this is illustrated in her description of homeplace as a viable space that serves many specific functions including concrete descriptions that aid us in recognizing dislocated and marginalized families. Her book of poetry describes how men, women, and children are involved in creating a homeplace, the routines and rituals that embody it, and the physical space that gives the homeplace form. And, lastly, it informs us about what happens in the lives of African Americans who do not have one.

Lastly, Waniek (1990) and Dilworth-Williams' (2002) homeplaces are viable theoretical tools. In comparison to empirical studies, these theoretical tools about homeplace provide conceptual guidance. Poetry tells us how the homeplace provides a sanctuary – a place where African Americans can embrace renewal and physical, mental, and emotional healing from frequent subtle and overt discriminatory assaults experienced by African Americans in predominantly White environments.

### *Black Family Reunions: Voices of the Scholars*

The research surrounding African American family reunions reveals that reunions matter especially in the racial socialization processes that contribute to its uniqueness. As a lens utilizing scholarly voices, Black family reunions provide a particular ontological view of family celebrations that connects to the oral stories and histories and to the African past as seen in the discussions of Jones (1980), Neville (1984), hooks (1990), Vargus (1997), Crichton (1998), Criswell (2004), and Miller-Cribbs (2004).

Jones (1980) theorizes that family reunions “constitute a structured ritual which allows individuals to attain personhood” and “involve gatherings of kin which function to

transmit certain values from generation-to-generation” (p. 63). This provides an opportunity, especially for children not only to participate in adult activities but also affirms perceptions about “notions of correct behavior toward kin.”

Related to behavior as discussed in the previous section is Stack’s (1996) explanation for the “return migration theme” that African Americans utilize which reveals the notion of homeplace as a critical and dynamic developmental process in their lives. This study presents Black family reunions as an alternative location for the homestead or homeplace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Neville’s (1984) theory, although it centers on European-American middle-class families of mainstream Protestant church affiliations is helpful as a lens, because it clarifies some of the questions that can be applied to the notions of African American family reunions. She centers her study “on one American ritual” of culture in the United States, family reunions, which presents the idea of *rituals of socialization* that are “significant to the contexts of learning” (p. 155). Neville argues that family reunions are “events where cultural meanings are expressed and enacted and through which children and adults learn and relearn the intricacies of a particular symbolic universe” (p. 151). Accordingly, family reunions have “a specific form and pattern,” with a beginning, middle and end recognized and validated by the native participants that is analogous to native speakers of the cultural language (p. 156). Neville writes:

The reunion carries a message, or a sequence of interrelated messages, through the arrangement of individuals using their space, time, and material items in symbolic ways. In looking about to answer the question “Who comes?” one observes and discovers through interviewing and listening that those who attend are a kin group, a group bound together by their identification with a common ancestor and children and grandchildren of the founder, and each person sees himself or herself in relation to the others as “cousins” and as members of “the Davis family” or “the Russell family.”... The wisdom and respect for age in this

ritual setting provide a counterpoint to the problems of neglected aged members of modern society...Children also are important in the celebration of the reunion, for they are the symbol of continuity, the testimony that life will go on. The names of individuals who had died in the past year are read aloud, as are the names of infants attending the reunion for the first time. If the reunion is held near the old homeplace or home church, a visit to the cemetery pays homage to “those who have gone before... (p. 157)

According to hooks (1990), family reunions foster a “community of resistance” (p. 42) that recaptures the history and heals African American families’ wounds. In other words, family reunions are places where African Americans can embrace the memory of their enslaved past (and the injury it has caused to the Black psyche) that continually becomes part of a forgotten past. The Black family reunion, then, becomes a reality where contemporary African American families can consciously renew their spirits and recover themselves (p. 47).

Vargus’ (1997) theorizes family reunions by posing the following questions: “What does it mean to be a Black family? Does our family background affect our everyday life? Who are we, where are we headed as a family?” (p. 1). Vargus defines the term “[Black family] reunion” as referring to “three-day or longer events when families gather, usually in hotels or some other facility, and have a set program” (p. 3). She contends,

Most reunions follow a particular format. Friday night is informal with getting to know you exercises and hospitality. Saturday is chock filled with a variety of activities and Saturday night is a banquet with more activities. Sunday is worship service and departure. If it is a holiday weekend more activities may be squeezed in, or time on the family’s own may be planned. (1997a, p. 4)

Crichton (1998) argues in her book, *Family Reunion: Everything You Need to Know to Plan Unforgettable Get-Togethers for Every Kind of Family*, “the family reunion ...carries out critical extended family functions such as providing a sense of



belonging and concern, transmitting a sense of identity and direction and strengthening values” (p. 166). One might consider these general traits or characteristics of American family reunions. Her book provides highlights about several characteristics of African American family reunions such as common ground. According to Crichton, “common ground is important” since Black families no longer share the same towns. “Today our sense of home is rooted less in place than in the family spirit itself...Reunions reinvent home, place, and culture” (as quoted in Lund, p. 5). Reunions are set apart from other family gatherings. “It’s a ritual unlike any other – a special time demanding reflection on and celebration of where we’ve been, who we are, and where we’re headed” (Crichton, 1998, p. 8).

For Crichton, reunions work if meaning to our lives is connected beyond the celebration “because reunions are about family, and the passages into and out of and through life by family members, they can never be only unalloyed celebrations. This is what makes the reunions special – the sense everyone cares enough to attend. At reunions, rituals exemplify existing paradoxes of family life such as, “my loss is your loss; your triumphs are mine as well” (Crichton, 1998, p. 9). “Even though the family is linked and strengthened by its past, it still urges itself into the future” (p. 9). The reunion as a form of Black race socialization is an overarching theme in my study. Crichton theorizes the following Family Ritual Styles:

***Minimized*** – Little may be planned for the reunion, with few announcements sent out and few activities scheduled. Affection and warmth may be present, but there may be a lack of cohesion, a sense of never fully coming together, and a lack of closure.

***Imbalanced*** – The reunion may take place at a formal restaurant, where kids have no entertainment, or at Disneyland, where activities are all focused on the kids.

***Interrupted*** – After the longtime organizer of a reunion dies, nobody steps in to fill her shoes. Years pass before the family realizes what they’ve lost.

***Rigid/Obligatory*** – The reunion is always held in the same place on the same date with the same foods. The structure makes no concessions to newcomers, and everyone is afraid to try something new. Attendance usually dwindles at rigid/obligatory reunions because in the end, they fill nobody’s needs or desires.

***Flexible*** – Families take into account the needs of all those attending, work on ways to include new family members, pay homage to those who have left the family, and organize activities from an intergenerational perspective. (p. 9)

Crichton, in her discussion about family reunions, includes the importance of organization to the reunion event. Along those lines, using a diagnostic approach to determine whether or not the reunion is fraught with problems is helpful. The “Diagnostic Chart” (Table 1) below guides families through such dilemmas. Criswell’s (2004) research corroborates Neville’s findings regarding the character, traits, and structure of family reunions. He argues, “White family reunions are typically one-day events held at the family’s old home place (p. 1) and begin before noon concluding by nightfall. “In contrast, African American family reunions typically involve two to three family names, usually the names of an ancestor and his or her spouse” (p. 1). Criswell adds that African American family reunions “follow a common pattern involving cookouts or fish fries on a Friday, barbecues and dances on Saturday, and church and Sunday dinner on the last day of the reunion” (p. 2).

Similarly, Miller-Cribbs’ states:

African Americans may have hundreds of participants (Schnedler, 1996). Frequently lasting approximately 2-3 days, reunions are generally highly organized affairs complete with t-shirts, talent shows, award ceremonies, athletic events, storytelling, and occasionally workshops related to social issues such as

**Table 1**  
***Can This Reunion Be Saved? Diagnostic Chart***

Here are some symptoms of diminishing enthusiasm for the family reunion and solutions for saving it.	
PROBLEM	SOLUTION
<b>Refusal to change:</b> Insistence on holding every reunion the third weekend in July, at the same park, with the same horseshoe stakes, even though nobody likes horseshoes anymore	Enlist new blood to adjust to real changes in family: new organizer, new program, new location
<b>The dwindles:</b> Third cousins gather in honor of ancestors they never knew to share memories they never had, because that's what their parents did	Dissolve and re-form, with more personal connection, or reinvent as a purely historical event
<b>Lack of organization:</b> Reunion organizers know that family members adore each other so much, they can just hang out happily for days at a stretch with no planned activities.	Plan activities that connect people so that they feel a sense of emotional satisfaction
<b>Overpricing:</b> Reunion organizers feel that everyone will love going on a cruise together, with all those activities	Contact other family members as "reality check" about what is affordable, and renew sensitivity to the financial situations of the extended family
<b>Over-frequency:</b> Reunion organizers are so thrilled by reunion's success, they persuade everyone to make it an annual event	Reduce frequency of reunions, increase enthusiasm

Modified from Crichton, 1995, p. 234

parenting (Bockman, 2000; Vargus, 1997a, 1997b). Southern families tend to gather annually or semi-annually for reunions (Criswell, 2000-2004, p. 164)

Miller-Cribbs (2004) argues that Black family reunions “ground people in a sense of place, of home and of family, and provide...a sense of connection” (p. 160). She provides directions for future research and practice utilizing five (5) main themes about the rituals of family life: 1) shared family identity and values, 2) a forum for intergenerational communication, 3) stability, organization, and continuity, 4) expression of cultural traditions, and 5) facing oppression.

In Table 2, I have reproduced Miller-Cribbs’ analysis of the functions of African American Family Reunions.

Finally, Crichton (1995, p. 234) suggests various occasions that could serve as a focus of successful reunions:

- Relative’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Couple’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of a beloved parent who has passed away
- 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the family’s arrival in America

**Table 2**

***Functions of Family Reunions – as Hypothesized from Available Literature***

<b>Preservation and revival of extended families and the functions of extended families</b>	
<b>Extended families</b>	Opportunities for reconnection and reduction of isolation, ‘Rituals of solidarity’ that maintain family unity
<b>Transmission of identity and values</b>	
<b>Link between the past and present</b>	
<b>Celebration and recognition of accomplishments of family members</b>	
<b>Transference and distribution of family resources (financial, educational, talent)</b>	Education scholarships, travel scholarships, family investments in hometowns, communities and churches and charitable causes, family credit unions, workshops
<b>Focus on addressing social problems</b>	Theme of survival, empowerment, emphasis on younger generations and provisions of role models

Table 3, entitled “The Reunion Roundup: The Four Basic Types” shows Crichton’s conceptualization of the basic types of family reunions.

Much is learned during Black family reunions that resonates in racial socialization processes and practices of African Americans, particularly the children. The study revealed that contemporary Black children do not always approach issues surrounding Whiteness in ways of past generations; therefore, the critical educational skills [tools] they possess look very different than their ancestors and *Elders*. Critical skills of the past were learned at home and passed down through generations of families through the oral tradition. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, it is critical that not only Black families [re]articulate the importance of culture, race socialization, and identity to their children, but also recognize that we are not yet in a *post-racial society* as contemporary myths would have you believe. Instead, racism looks differently, therefore the approaches necessary to eradicate it will vary accordingly. The sooner African Americans are educated about new forms of racism, the more adeptly they will be able to navigate systems of oppression.

**Table 3**  
***Reunion Roundup: The Four Basic Types***

REUNION TYPE	WHO ATTENDS	PLANNING TIME	DURATION	SITE	FOOD	COSTS	DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS
<i>Backyard Barbecue</i>	Siblings and/or cousins (25-60)	2 – 6 months	Day into evening	Backyard or park	Food provided by host family, with potluck contributions	Food & barbeque supplies, park shelter or tent rental	Informal reunion organization; unstructured activities;
<i>Homecoming</i>	Siblings, cousins, possibly extended family (50-100)	6 – 12 months	Day, with informal get-togethers the day before and after	Large backyard or town park with tent or other shelter	Potluck or catered	Food & barbeque supplies, park shelter or tent rental, table and chair rentals	Informal reunion organization; somewhat structured activities; strengthens existing relationships and family identity
<i>Weekend Classic</i>	Cousins, extended or ancestral family (50-300)	1 – 3 years	Weekend or long weekend (3 – 4 days)	Hotel, conference center, park lodge, resort, camp	Catered	Transportation, registration fees for directory, T-shirts, meeting room & activities, lodging and food paid for by each family	Formal reunion organization; structured activities; printed materials; time and financial committee; expands vision of family
<i>Family Camp</i>	Siblings, cousins (15 – 75)	1 year	Week or more	Condos, camps, lakeside and seaside cottages	Shared cooking and shopping	Shared rental, food, and house-Cleaning costs; transportation	Informal reunion organization; structured activities; pitching in with chores; extended time with smaller family group deepens existing relationships

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*Wade Nobles (1975) has pointed out that the task of the Black family has been to prepare its children to live and be among White people without becoming White people.*

— Hale, 1982

*After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder...The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self....*

— W. E. B. DuBois (1903)  
The Souls of Black Folk,  
“Of Our Spiritual Strivings”

### *Introduction*

Hale’s excerpt above hints at DuBois’ (1903) notion of “double consciousness,” a particular understanding or level of Black consciousness that not only prepares one to navigate White supremacist structures, but also, enables one to comprehend the differences between worldviews and why those differences exist – a *double consciousness* that African Americans need in order to navigate White supremacy. `

This section of the study draws on Hale's (1982) seminal study, *Black Children, Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles* in order to make sense of the meanings that stem from African American cultural practices that I examined in this literature review.

According to Hale,

Black parents generally want their children to master the tools of mainstream society so that they can be economically viable and can contribute to the creative development of their community and society. At the same time, the Black community wants to preserve and celebrate aspects of Afro-American culture. (p. 62)

Hale wrote about the *duality of socialization* for Black people. For example, she noted that the peer pressure that Black children encounter is an indication that they must be prepared "to imitate the hip, cool, behavior [in the larger society] of the culture in which they live and at the same time take on those behaviors that are necessary to be upwardly mobile" (p. 62). In another example, Hale drew on the scholarship of Lawrence Levine (1977) to explain the reason "for the persistence of Black language" (p. 62) during a time when there was pressure to conform to Standard English:

Living in the midst of a hostile and repressive White society, Black people found in language an important means of promoting and maintaining a sense of group unity and cohesion. Thus, while the appropriateness and usefulness of speaking Standard English in certain situations was understood, within the group, there were frequently pressures to speak the vernacular. (p. 133)

The multilayering of African American consciousness is a primary concern for African American parents. On the one hand, they desire that their children learn assimilation techniques to progress, for instance, in mainstream schools. On the other hand, African Americans must develop a certain kind of awareness to manipulate this task while directing and developing an understanding of their culture, beliefs, and values that are in direct contestation with the dominant culture. The task of Black parents is to



unravel these complexities in a way that allows their children to understand the seriousness of the mission and simultaneously absorb the protective strategies such as having two very different perspectives of consciousness – one White that assists in progress and success outside of the home and the other Black that enables one to proudly embrace one's culture and self-concept.

Ward (1973) writes that many scholars...argue that language and culture virtually program the mind so that the individual as a learner is both bounded and shaped according to the world and life view and the mental-process styles of his culture. (Hale, 1982, p. 22)

Toward this end, Hill identified and analyzed five strategies that strengthen Black families: strong kinship bonds, strong achievement orientation, adaptability of family roles, strong religious orientation, and strong work orientation. He maintained that the five characteristics have been functional for the survival, advancement, and stability of Black families (p. 47). In the literature review that follows, I explored the oral tradition through African American literature, studies on Black racial socialization, and the available literature on family reunions (aforementioned five strategies) and assessed their relevance to the African American families.

*The Humanities: Grounding Black Cultural Meanings in Racial  
Socialization through African American Literature*

I concluded that there is much to be learned from the humanities, specifically, African American folk culture, from gardening to quilting and most importantly spirituality and its more formal literary productions, which grounds (i.e., shows, explains, and transmits) the meanings that framed Black culture through African American imagery while simultaneously reifying the racial socialization process.

Tremendous insights into the significant cultural role of African American oral and artistic folklore/folk culture and its more formal written literature are provided by the poet and novelist Alice Walker and feminist and social activist bell hooks, both of whom are interested in intergenerational knowledge and how it is gained from art such as one's mother's garden, in Walker's case, and hooks' inheritance of quilt-making. Walker (1983) connected the notion of place and/or artifact to mothers and grandmothers, whom she sees as artists. She poses the question, "How was the creativity of the Black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century, when...it was a punishable crime for a Black person to read or write?" (p. 234). Walker found the answer in the stories told by her mother and grandmother. These stories, Walker insisted, "must be recorded" (p.240) so that we can pass them along to future generations for posterity. Walker claimed that in retelling these stories, we are "[g]uided by our heritage of a love of beauty and respect for strength." Walker found in the metaphor of her mother's garden a roadmap to herself – to her identity. (p. 241).

Walker's rhetorical questions about art; namely, beauty, creativity, and spirituality became what hooks (1990) referred to as an aesthetic of Black women that is ordinary and reveals itself randomly. Walker's mother "adorned whatever shabby house they lived in" with flowers picked from her garden. She was no ordinary gardener, since she had over 50 varieties of flowers. However, Walker's mother created a certain aesthetic with her art that included homemade clothing, canned vegetables and fruits, quilts, music, stories, and poetry. All are part of the Black aesthetic that is considered ordinary, everyday art.

In a similar fashion, hooks (1990) wrote about the values her grandmother instilled in her through the inheritance of quilts. hooks admonished herself because she did not record information about quilting before her grandmother died, when she could have detailed the nuances about the process of quilt-making. For instance, hooks compared quilting to the “meditative practice” of the Japanese tea ceremony. Like the tea ceremony, it was important for her to “learn how to hold her arms and the needles – just so – ...learning the proper body posture” and most importantly learning how to “make her work beautiful” (p. 117). hooks claimed that her grandmother like famous quilt-makers such as Harriett Powers understood the value of making their own quilts, not solely regarding skill time but as the unique expression of her imaginative vision. For instance, the story quilts that her grandmother made were “inventive pictorial narrations;” and therefore she “came into womanhood understanding and appreciating the way one’s creative imagination could find expression in quilt-making” (p. 118).

White families (who owned the labor of the slaves who quilted) preserved African American quilts that were passed down from generation to generation. hooks’ grandmother’s quilts revealed stories as she “worked through generations.” Significantly, hooks reflected about her grandmother, Baba:

To share the story of a quilt was central to Baba’s creative self-expression, as family historian, storyteller, exhibiting the work of her hands...Her patterned quilts, “The Star of David,” “The Tree of Life,” were made for decorative purposes, to be displayed at family reunions. (p. 121; emphasis added)

Accordingly, the stories that hooks told focus on the legacy of commitment to one’s art that symbolized her rural Black roots. In doing so, hooks drew on Faith Ringgold’s notion about the creative artistry of quilts and artifice which reminds us of the utility of quilts. hooks said, “This quilt (which I intend to hold onto for the rest of my life)

reminds me of who I am and where I have come from” (p. 121). She seemed to conclude that Black women’s sense of aesthetics is committed to creative work that inspired and sustained the African American community when she wrote, “We reclaim their history, call their names, state their particulars, to gather and remember, to share our inheritance” (p. 121-22).

Collins (2000) connected quilt-making to African American beauty standards by redefining beauty; thereby, extending the notion of beauty to include those lessons learned at home. “This requires learning to see with the idea of Black women’s aesthetics as a way to teach and learn about pride and self-esteem both individually and collectively that is accomplished through use of the quilt metaphor applied onto the stories. This is done to reject the stigma assigned to African American females and assist them in identifying practices within Black civil society that are harmful to Black women as a collectivity” (p. 169) such as the images of African American women in the dominant society.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker offered what is clearly her fictional verification of the cultural and historical importance of quilting<sup>8</sup>. Although this interpretation of the quilt, suggests a way of reading *The Color Purple*, I argued that the text gave insight to Celie’s racial socialization; that is, through the plot we see the lessons quilting offers

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<sup>8</sup> Priscilla Leder’s (1999) book, *Alice Walker's American Quilt: The Color Purple and American Literary Tradition*, provides insights into Walker’s quilt metaphor: Quilts and quilting play a key role in *The Color Purple*. Both the product and the process provide an outlet for thwarted energies, record a family's history by incorporating its discarded garments, and effect reconciliations between characters. Even more importantly, they embody the ideal of unity in diversity which permeates Walker's writings. The pieces of a quilt, like individuals in a pluralistic society, retain their original identities while functioning as parts of something else—just as the star-like pieces in the "Sister's Choice" pattern remain recognizable as Shug Avery's yellow dress.

about how the characters survive on the fragments of their lives and we, the readers, witness how it revives a rural southern Black family as the storyline itself parallels Celie's quilt-making. It is metaphoric, and I argued, it is related to the idea of spirituality – i.e., Black culture and learning the lesson of “making do.”<sup>9</sup> In sum, quilting represents the site where *pedagogies of the Black home* are in effect and where alternatives for living lives that are authentic and fulfilling are clearly found.<sup>10</sup> According to Logan(2001) part of this perspective includes spirituality.

In Sadye Logan's (2001) piece, “Resiliency Through Spirituality,” she discussed the notion of spirituality. She wrote:

One final value found within the African American culture that has a lasting legacy in strengthening the family unit is spirituality. Spirituality can assume multiple meanings; for example, spirituality can be manifested in a belief structure of perpetual optimism and the ability to recover from adversity. African Americans' undaunted belief in “a better day” is said to be based on a strong religious orientation. Such a belief system sustains the family unit, because the belief is transferred and transported onto children. Likewise, spirituality leads to parental hopefulness, which is undergirded by love, support, and commitment to children.

A more concrete example of spirituality is that of the African American church. This institution is viewed as a major ingredient in preserving the family. The church often serves as a vehicle of renewal and solace. In addition to providing spiritual guidance, church activities (e.g., church “welfare” programs, libraries, nurseries, preschools, Saturday and Sunday schools) intensify the bonding and solidarity of African American families. (Scott & Black, 1994, p. 153)

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<sup>9</sup> The idea of “making do” is used within a family context meaning to manage to get along with whatever is available and implies the resilience or utilization of whatever material capital available to complete the task at hand.

<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Elaine Showalter, in her essay *Piecing and Writing*, connects patchwork quilts and writing in North American short stories. She claims that piecing, the technique of assembling fragments into an intricate design provides the contexts in which to interpret and understand forms, meanings, etc.

Spirituality relates to the spirit or soul and not to physical nature or matter; it is intangible. Ladner (1971) distinguished the notion of soul in this way:

The concept of “soul” symbolizes the foundations of Black culture. Black culture can be viewed as a non-material culture, and can be more clearly observed in the emotive responses of Black people than in their artifacts; more poignantly in their spirituals and jazz than in their craftsmanship; more lucidly in the strong bond between mother and child than in the ability to provide that child with all of the *material* luxuries life can afford. Indeed, the ultimate nurture of this culture can be made with a simple distinction between Aretha Franklin singing the blues, and her imitator the late Janis Joplin. Aretha Franklin has lived the oppressed life – the blues and Janis Joplin had not. Hence, Miss Joplin *never* comprehended this highest form of reality. Our gift to American society has been spiritual and cultural and has, at various times in our history, acted to forge basic humanistic values which this society greatly needed. Lerone Bennett, historian, articulates the meaning of soul and its implications for Black culture in his essay “Ethos: Voices from the Cave”:

The whole corpus of the tradition . . . is compressed into the folk myth of *Soul*, The American counterpart of the African *Negritude*, a distinct quality of Negro-ness growing out of the Negro’s experience and not his genes. *Soul* is a metaphorical evocation of Negro being as expressed in the Negro tradition. It is the feeling with which an artist invest his creation, the style which a man lives his life. It is, above all, the spirit rather than the letter: a certain way of feeling, a certain way of expressing oneself, a certain way of being.

From the womb of this non-Puritan, nonmachine, nonexploitative tradition have come insights, values, and attitudes that have changed the face of America. The tradition is very definitely nonmachine, but is not anti-machine; it simply recognizes that machines are generative power and not soul, instruments and not ends. (pp. 277-78)

Further, Ladner believed that spirituality is an aesthetic quality of Black culture “that offers this society the basic humanistic values which have disappeared through the process of neo-colonialism and its rapid technological advancements” (p. 278). In other words, she thought that mechanized processes as values overcame basic spiritual qualities of life. Along these lines, Ladner advocated for this type of Black humanism to counteract “the prevailing destructive forces within the society.” Table 4,” Values, Characteristics, and Belief Systems That Have Sustained African American Families” is

**Table 4**  
***Values, Characteristics, and Belief Systems That Have Supported African American Families***

<i>Billingsley, 1968, 1992</i>	<i>Boykin, 1983</i>	<i>Christopherson, 1979</i>	<i>Gary et al., 1983</i>	<i>Hill, 1971</i>	<i>Martin &amp; Martin, 1985</i>	<i>McAdoo, 1988</i>	<i>Nobles, 1976, 1979, 1988</i>	<i>Scanzoni, 1971 Staples, 1994</i>	<i>Stack, 1974 Aschenbrenner, 1973</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value of learning, knowledge, education, and skill development</li> <li>• Deep spiritual values</li> <li>• Quest for self-governance</li> <li>• Service to others</li> <li>• Cooperative economics, politics, and social goals</li> <li>• Race pride</li> <li>• Strong Black-owned, private enterprises</li> <li>• Family ties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spirituality</li> <li>• Harmony</li> <li>• Movement</li> <li>• Verve</li> <li>• Affect</li> <li>• Communalism</li> <li>• Expressive individualism</li> <li>• Orality</li> <li>• Social time perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love of children</li> <li>• Acceptance of children born out of wedlock</li> <li>• Strong resilience</li> <li>• Adaptability of family coping skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong kinship bonds</li> <li>• Strong achievement orientation</li> <li>• Parenting skills</li> <li>• Strong religious-philosophical orientation</li> <li>• Intellectual-cultural orientation</li> <li>• Ability to deal with crises</li> <li>• Strong work orientation</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Active recreation orientation</li> <li>• Appreciation for each other</li> <li>• Adaptability for each other</li> <li>• Adaptability of family roles</li> <li>• Self-expression</li> <li>• Love, kindness, and compassion</li> <li>• Supportiveness and caring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong kinship bonds</li> <li>• Strong work orientation</li> <li>• Adaptability of family roles</li> <li>• Strong achievement orientation</li> <li>• Strong religious orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elements of extended family               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mutual aid</li> <li>2. Social class cooperation</li> <li>3. Male-female cooperation</li> <li>4. Pro-socialization of children</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Extension of extended family elements               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fictive kinship</li> <li>2. Racial consciousness</li> <li>3. Religious consciousness</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Institutions of Black helping tradition               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Black churches</li> <li>2. Mutual aid societies</li> <li>3. Fraternal orders</li> <li>4. Women's clubs</li> <li>5. Unions</li> <li>6. Orphanages, senior homes, and hospitals</li> <li>7. Schools</li> <li>8. Protest movements</li> <li>9. Race-consciousness organizations</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinship and mutual assistance are more than provision of basic needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong family ties</li> <li>• Unconditional love of children</li> <li>• Respect for self and others</li> <li>• Assumed natural goodness of children</li> <li>• Legitimation of beingness</li> <li>• Provision of a family code</li> <li>• Elasticity of boundaries</li> <li>• Provision of information and knowledge</li> <li>• Mediation of concrete conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong mother-child bonds</li> <li>• Heavy emotional nurturance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship and kinship ties</li> <li>• Reciprocity</li> <li>• Fidelity to family obligations</li> <li>• Strong commitment to children</li> </ul>

Modified from Logan, 2001, p. 14

reproduced from Logan's (2001) book, *The Black Family: Strengths, Self-Help and Positive Change* to assess African American values, etc. that I argued have been lost during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Returning to the discussion, we see the idea of spirituality throughout *The Color Purple* in the progression of the friendship that develops between Celie, the protagonist, and Sophia, her sister-in-law. Oppressed and socialized by the teachings of the predominantly male society in which she lives, and lacking personal self-esteem, Celie tells Harpo, her adopted son, to beat his uncontrollable wife Sophia. When Harpo tries to do so, he is solidly whipped by Sophia, who confronts Celie for her misguided lessons.

You told Harpo to beat me, she said  
No, I didn't, I said.  
Do not lie, she said.  
Then what you say it for? she ast.

.....  
I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it cause I' jealous of you.  
I say it cause you do what I can't.  
What that? she say.  
Fight. I say.

.....  
She say, All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. . . . I love Harpo, she say . . . But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me.  
. . . I am so shame of myself, I say and the Lord he done whip me little bit too."

— Walker, *The Color Purple*, pp. 37-38

When Celie related to Sophia that her husband, Mr., abused her, Sophia told her: "You ought to bash Mr. head open, she say. Think bout heaven later" (p. 39). At the end of their confrontation, Celie learns much about male-female relationships, and she learns to defend herself against physical abuse. Above all, she learns how to love herself. To celebrate the lessons she has learned and the bonding of their friendship, Sophia invites



Celie to quilt: “Let’s make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains, she say. And I run git my pattern book.” In the end, both women are restored; they are able to put their fragmented lives and selves back together again, finding wholeness in their friendship and in the art and process of quilting.

Like Walker, Richard Wright, another Southerner, uses his personal narrative, *Black Boy* (1939), to sharply contrast the nurturance African Americans practiced to combat oppression, racism, and reveal family socialization, particularly, as it relates to the role of mother and grandmother.<sup>11</sup> When Wright is injured in a fight with White boys and goes to his mother for sympathy, she punished him. “She would smack my rump with the stave, and, while the skin was still smarting, impart to me gems of Jim Crow wisdom. I was never to throw cinders any more. I was never to fight any more wars. I was never, never, under any conditions, to fight White folks again.” (*Black Boy*, p. 23-25) Ironically, Wright’s mother taught him how to defend himself against the Black bullies in his segregated Memphis neighborhood who beat him and stole the money she had given him to buy groceries. To overcome his fear, Wright’s mother gives him a stick, locks him out the house, and tells him not to return home without the groceries on the list she had given him. “If those boys bother you, then fight” (*Black Boy*, p. 24). Wright succeeds in whipping his enemies. He writes: “That night I won the right to the streets of Memphis” (p. 25). These stories exhibit the harshness of oppressive structures of Southern Black

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<sup>11</sup> Butler (2009) writes that as autobiography, *Black Boy* tells two stories: 1) it documents the injustice of Wright’s social environment and 2) it exhibits Wright’s spirituality and how he transcended it (p. 47). Wright was socialized, in part, by his mother who influenced him “in his early years” and provided “streets, trades and roadways” that became “vehicles of later experience” (p. 56).

life under Jim Crow laws of “separate but equal” that he was able to overcome because of the lessons he learned from his mother.

Professor and Social Worker Sadye Logan (2001), who developed a framework of values and characteristics, had this to say about the role of Black grandmothers that I argue is essential to the homeplace:

...the centrality of grandmothers is critical in bolstering African American family functioning. Flaherty, Facticeau, and Garner (1994) found seven key functions of grandmothers in their study of multigenerational African American studies: managing, caretaking, coaching, assessing, nurturing, assigning, and patrolling. Grandmothers are often the glue that holds generations of family members together. They are referred to for guidance in both major and minor family matters. Such eminence is not granted to the grandmother simply because of African Americans’ regard and respect for elders but also because she epitomizes endurance, wisdom, and spirituality. (p. 150)

Many of Wright’s lessons resonate with those learned by Maya Angelou and recorded in her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1978), which draws on the hurt and pain enumerated by Paul Laurence Dunbar in his poem “Sympathy,” that were known to Blacks at the turn of the 20th century, a time when racism, Jim-Crowism, and even lynching were rampant in U.S. society. One of the most powerful lessons young Maya learns from her phenomenal grandmother (Momma), Mrs. Annie Henderson, a proud Black businesswoman that owned her own store, was provided when her Momma was disrespected by a few “powhitetrash” girls who mocked, agitated, and addressed her by her first name to show their conviction that their Whiteness empowered them, in a way that Maya’s grandmother’s Black skin could not, in the segregated South, despite her economic status.

Describing Momma’s response, Angelou writes: “She did an excellent job of sagging from the waist down, but from waist up she seemed to be pulling for the top of

the oak tree across the road. Then she began to moan a hymn.” Angelou reports, “Momma never turned her head or unfolded her arms. . .Something had happened out there that I couldn’t completely understand, but I could see that she was happy. Then she bent down and touched me as mothers of the church ‘lay hands on the sick and afflicted’ and I quieted.” (Angelou, pp. 23-26)

Morrison’s (1970) *The Bluest Eye* shows another perspective of family that is not seen in Walker, hooks, Wright or Angelou’s work; yet one that also offers insight into home as a significant site where *pedagogies of the Black home* were in effect and where alternatives were clearly found. Morrison placed emphasis on a home in which love is absent (ironically) despite the fact that the family’s name is Breedlove. The protagonist, Pecola is not loved by her parents. However, in the extended family world in which she lives, Pecola certainly gets love from her neighbors (the community). Pecola shares a meaningful relationship with the neighbors, the McTeers and three prostitutes that live above her storefront home. Pecola, who is raped by her father in the novel and becomes nihilistic as a result, turns to the more positive lessons taught by the collective community<sup>12</sup> in the form of the McTeers and the prostitutes. When Pecola’s family puts her out, the McTeers take her in. The narrator explains:

There is a difference between being put out and being put outdoors. If you are put *out*, you go somewhere else; if you are *outdoors*, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. (*Bluest Eye*, p. 17)

Despite complaining about having to take care of Pecola because of her father’s behavior that made the Breedlove family homeless, Mrs. McTeers whose love was “thick and dark

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<sup>12</sup> See Griffen (1995) for a discussion on this concept.

like Alaga syrup” (12), shows her deep love and unconditional love for Pecola when Pecola begins her period.

Mama led us to the bathroom. She prodded Pecola inside, and taking the underwear from me, told us to stay out.  
 We could hear water running into the bathtub.  
 “You think she’s goin to drown her?”  
 “Oh, Claudia, You so dumb. She’s just going to wash her clothes and all . . .  
 (*Bluest Eye* p. 31)

Pecola’s family is not always in her corner; however, the community is there for her. For example, when Pecola visits the three prostitutes: China, Poland, and Miss Marie, she is greeted by love-filled terms of endearment: “Hi dumpling. Where your socks? Marie seldom called Pecola the same thing twice, but invariably her epithets were fond ones chosen from menus and dishes that were forever uppermost in her mind” (p. 51). Pecola is guided by the outside world or the community rather than the inside world, her immediate family.

Acclaimed poet and author Margaret Walker presents a book of poetry where part one begins a “middle class female's *bildungsroman* that collapses class distinctions as the speaker aligns herself with different groups of common Blacks and discovers her vocation as a political poet” (Allego, 1997). Similar to Richard Wright, her grandmothers were central to her existence, as in the poem, *Lineage*, that preface the Introduction of the study. In the poem, the speaker realizes that she lacks the strength of her grandmothers who, even though they stoop and follow plows, are robust women who bring the land to fruition. Moreover, the emotional strength of their singing complements that of their bodies, and their uttering “clean words” implies a wisdom consisting of moral truth and its practical application in daily affairs. By admitting that she lacks her grandmothers' strength, the speaker acknowledges these women as role models...” (Allego, 1997).

*Lineage* connects to my maternal second cousin Viola's quote at the beginning of the study which speaks to my ancestral grandmothers. Just as Walker, I was inspired to write this dissertation about my ancestral grandmothers and their legacy for posterity.

Finally, various nuances of family, community, and values come to full circle in Morrison's (1970) third novel *Song of Solomon*, which is a *bildungsroman*, a novel that traces the development of its protagonist, Macon (Milkman) Dead III, from boyhood to manhood. On the one hand, Milkman is greatly influenced by his middle-class father, a merciless landlord who teaches him to "Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you will own yourself and other people too" (p. 55). On the other hand, he is directed by Pilate, his aunt, whose very name indicates the role she is to play as *Elders* -Guide in his life. Although his father forbids him from interacting with Pilate (who is actually his father's sister), Milkman goes with his friend Guitar to meet her one day. Immediately upon meeting him, Pilate begins to teach him. When he greets her by saying "Hi," Pilate questions:

What kind of word is that? . . . It means hello.  
Then say what you mean.  
Okay. Hello.  
That's better . . . (p. 36).

Her central role is to teach him about his heritage which Milkman hears for the first time in the folksong Pilate and her daughters sing:

Sugarman done fly away  
Sugarman done gone  
Sugarman cut across the sky  
Sugarman gone home (p. 49)

The story draws on the popular Gullah folktale, *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton,

1985).<sup>13</sup> To claim his nonmaterial inheritance, Milkman travels to Danville, Pennsylvania the home of his paternal grandparents, in search of a cache he believes is his material legacy. There, he is reunited with an entire community that knew the story of his murdered great grandfather, who became an orphan when his African father flew back to Africa and left him behind. In this obvious family reunion, Milkman learns that the ultimate treasure he is seeking and needs most is not material but instead is the history of his family that he learns, which had been kept alive in communal and familial folklore, even in the games his rural cousins played. In other words, the theme of kinship and the idea that family is more than blood is the point of Morrison's thesis.

Central to the achievement of a healthy manhood is returning back and cultivating a relationship with the ancestor. During the journey, Milkman adapts his ancestor's song to meet present-day needs. Also, Milkman's return to the South, home of his ancestors, is necessary for him to find himself, for historical consciousness, and in order for him to stand on a higher spiritual and intellectual plane. It is a site of history and redemption for him – a place where he can begin to piece together the fragments and where he can grasp and sing the Song of the Son.<sup>14</sup>

Within the construct of the humanities that include the African American literature used in the study, the three significant themes that surfaced were

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<sup>13</sup> See Blake's (1980) critique about a group of African-born slaves "who rose up one day from the field where they were working and flew back to Africa." The story becomes both the end of, and a metaphor for, the protagonist's identity quest. Milkman finds himself when he learns the story of his great-granddaddy, Solomon, who could fly (p. 77).

<sup>14</sup> See Griffen's (1995) discussion on p. 172.

intergenerational knowledge transmission (hooks, 1990; Morrison, 1977; Walker, 1987; Wright, 1940), resistance (Angelou, 1969; Walker, 1970; and Wright, 1940), and the idea of the Black family and its kinship relations as an institution of empowerment. The first theme provided a particular ontological view of the transmission of knowledge over time. The second theme, resistance, showed the function of knowledge production that is, what it is being used for and how it is practiced, for example, to end racism. The third theme answered the question: *Who transmits the knowledge?* The institution of the family is the site where the knowledge is being transmitted – i.e., it is a site or social location where learning, by particular individuals, is being physically transmitted to the next generations. I argued that *pedagogies of the Black home* embody the Black racial socialization that occur within both, home, historically, and family reunions today because these practices center the home.

### *Black Racial Socialization: Its Purpose*

Parents want their children to have high self-esteem, pride in racial heritage, positive attitudes about being Black, and racial-social awareness. One mother, in her study, discussed how she prepares her children about the realities of being Black in America. I have to say to them, look you are Black in America, and America is not going to let you forget that, even if you do. I do not want it to slap you in the face with that reality. (Bright, 1994, p. 8)

Racial socialization is a cultural practice of African American families aimed at preparing individuals to effectively resist, cope with, and combat White racism. Notions of modeling and providing critical messages, as Bright's excerpt above illustrates, are often part of the ways Black families racially socialize their children. Black parents use strategies of racial socialization in educating their children at home about African American culture in preparation for their potential experiences with racism and prejudice

outside of the home (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). I used an examination of sociocultural research to focus on African American families, children, and youth in this part of my research to answer the research questions.

The lessons that Black parents pass on to their children, what I called *pedagogies of the Black home*, are the various components of racial socialization that I detailed in this section. These included the notions about cultural heritage, values, beliefs, and spirituality. Importantly, the research that follows revealed that African American parents socialized their children in an African-centered worldview to raise their awareness of the world outside of their homes.

Chase L. Lesane-Brown and Tony N. Brown, (2006) defined racial socialization as a way for parents and guardians “to protect [children’s] psychological functioning and to prepare them to deal with prejudice and discrimination...to educate them about the social and psychological consequences of being Black in the United States” (p. 164). Racial socialization is a responsibility “Black parents share with all parents in raising children who are emotionally and physically healthy children who are Black in a society in which being Black has negative connotations” (Peters, 1985, p. 494). Albeit teachers and schools are important factors in the race socialization process, Slaughter and Epps (1987) argued about the importance of parents. Black teachers, like parents, instilled children with academic skills as well as lessons about dignity, racial pride, resiliency, self-reliance, self-respect, and faith. For example, Beverly Greene (1990) argued, “the task of the Black family is to prepare its children to live among White people without becoming White people – to mediate between two often contradictory cultures” (p. 209). This process for Greene is a “duality of socialization.” Greene presents a general



discussion about motherhood. She examined the legacy of adaptive strengths that African American mothers have used to socialize Black children in a hostile context. She looked at the traditional resources found in Black families and interventions to maximize resources in Black families, so that any attempt to understand Black families has to be understood within the complexity of their heritage. Greene argued, “A major task of parenting persons is that of interpreting the outside world’s messages to a child about who she or he is with respect to Black and White persons and what his or her respective place is in the world is or can be” (p. 210). Greene asserted that a Black child’s preparation by parents to understand and take pride in their own culture can be a major source of resilience and coping. This race consciousness provided a necessary foundation for the coping strategies needed by Black children (p. 213). Further, Greene provided a discussion about the distinct aspects of Black mothers’ roles because it is accompanied by tasks not required of White counterparts. For example, Black mothers have to teach Black children about racism and the strategies to resist that are adaptive and sometimes maladaptive. Greene illustrated through discussion how adaptive strategies function such as the notion of “othermothers” who are kin and the idea that children belong to the community (p. 207).<sup>15</sup>

Racial socialization as defined by Stevenson (1994) is a process to buffer against societal antagonism toward people of color and seeks to develop self- and community respect. Similarly, Miller (1999) defined racial socialization as those protective factors that Black children can act as a buffer against negative racial messages. In this process, children procure their sense of ethnic and racial identity. Wade A. Boykin and Forrest D.

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<sup>15</sup> See Collins’ (2000) discussion about “community mothers.”

Tom (1985) found in their study a profound incompatibility between Black and mainstream cultural frames of reference. Boykin and Toms (1985) argue that [racial] socialization refers to the preparation of children to take on the adult roles and responsibilities in society. Black cultural motifs are typically what is passed on – modes of behavior, sequences, and styles of behavior – tacit conditioning picked up through day-to-day interactions with others. These are habitual forms of behavior (p. 42). Thus, the qualities attributed to Blackness are in opposition to the qualities rewarded in society (p. 43).

Thornton (1997) argued that the general goal of the [racial] socialization process is to make children familiar with statuses, social roles, and prescribed behavior. According to Thornton, Black parents must act as a buffer between their offspring and society, and filter societal information and be a primary interpreter of the social structure for their children. It is within the family that children first become aware of and begin to grapple with the significance of racism and discrimination. However, “there is little significant evidence regarding how Black families buffer and insulate their children and foster a functional group and personal identity” (p. 202). Thornton’s study found that parents who explicitly inculcate race into socialization processes do so because they perceive that they are raising not an American, but a Black or African American whose situation is distinct from that of other American children. According to Thornton, the [racial] socialization process is complex – Blacks have to simultaneously negotiate through three distinctive realms of experience to acquire a racial consciousness: 1) mainstream, 2) minority, and 3) cultural experiences.

Participation in mainstream life characterizes all Blacks from all walks of life – this cannot be avoided. Black parents still strived to teach their children things that are White American and see their primary role as that of teaching life skills. They conveyed the importance of personal qualities, life, confidence, ambition, and respect which are more meaningful than messages of race and socialize their children in race neutral ways. The minority perspective involved ways of responding to racism, which emphasized preparing children for an oppressive environment. In other words, children must be prepared for a nonsupport environment by being proud to be Black and learning how to cope with prejudice.

Thornton's final strategy, Black cultural expression, linked African American children to traditional West Africa, and taught the child about famous Black historical figures, and spoke of family history. A range or variation is seen across these three types that are found in every Black family (pp. 205-207). Armed with memories including their own and others' experiences, Black parents transmitted messages to their children that began a watershed experience of exposing children to the significance of racial categories and stratification. Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006) argued that Black parents, on the basis of their evaluation of the racial climate, will tailor messages they transmit to their children to be consonant with the particular historical period during which their children will come of age. Understanding the racial climate during a particular historical period facilitates prediction of the race socialization messages transmitted by the parents (p. 203).

Thompson, Anderson, and Bakeman (2000) quoted Greene to argue race socialization: "Black parents communicate to Black children about what it means to be a

Black American and what they may expect and how to cope with it” (p. 198). They also discuss the “duality of socialization” where many Black parents feel that they have a dual task: teaching their children how to cope in an outside hostile environment and instilling them with a positive Black identity.

Racial socialization is an interactive communicative process where parents and children engage in decisions concerning their cultural heritage and how to navigate the racial landscape (Scott, 2002, p. 523). Racial socialization has been a primary means through which resiliency has been studied among Black American adolescents (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). Based on their research, Black racial socialization, promotes a healthy mistrust of non-Blacks. Further, based on a consensus of several researchers, Scott states that racial socialization unravels the harmful effects of a discriminatory environment (p. 324).

Demo and Hughes (1990) argued that, the family context is generally regarded as the most influential socialization setting for forming the child’s emerging sense of self, values, and beliefs. The family influence is evident in the amount, scope, and intensity of parent-child interaction. Related also is the ongoing, reciprocal processes of attachment, identification, modeling, and role-playing; and in the impact of familial relationships on children’s dispositions toward self and others (Demo, Small, & Savin-Williams 1987; Gecas & Schwalbe 1986). Through these processes socialization serves to transmit values, norms, morals, and beliefs from one generation to the next (p. 365).

Hale (1983) suggested that the “Black family has had to fulfill several functions because of the oppression it is called upon to mediate” (p. 61). She names five functions that assist parents in this endeavor: an alternate frame of reference, duality of

socialization, self-concept development, socialization of African American males, and socialization of African American females. She cited Wade Nobles (1974b) who attributed child-rearing practices to African influences, and suggested a creation for an alternate frame of reference:

[Nobles] describes these orientations as each possessing a “set of guiding principles, dominant values and customs and . . . behavioral and mental dispositions of a particular people.” He describes African ethos as being “survival of the tribe” and “one with nature.” The cultural values associated with this world view are cooperation, interdependence, and collective responsibility. (p. 61)

The Black mother must prepare her child to “take on the appropriate sex and age roles (which by historical and philosophical definition are flexible, interchangeable and fluid) as well as the racial role (which by social and political definition are ones of resistance, suspicion and caution)” (p. 15).

Regarding self-concept development, Hale stated that Black parents have been challenged to foster positive self-concept development in their children. They bolster their children’s egos by such comments as “You’re just as good as anybody else.” They must soothe the anxieties that arise in their children when they engage in competition or social comparison with White children (p. 64).

Thomas and Speight (1999) argued that socialization patterns differ according to the types of race messages conveyed through socializing process. “Socialization in African American families differs according to the types of messages taught to children” (p. 154). Their argument paralleled Thornton (1997) in that it too provides three racial socialization categories: 1) mainstream, 2) minority, and 3) Black cultural expression (see Table 5).

**Table 5**  
***Racial Socialization Patterns and Race Messages of Black Parents***

Study	Race Socialization Pattern	Race Message
<b>Brown &amp; Lesane-Brown (2006)</b> Parents racially socialize their children based on their appraisal of racial climate/time period in history.  Parents are conduits of racial meaning; do parents convey the meaning of race?  What are the normative messages about race?  Black parents are privy to history...ancestral wisdom.	<u>Proscriptive</u> : racial pride/in-group attachment  <u>Prescriptive</u> : preparation for racial prejudice & description	Students will be able to understand the characteristics of leadership, courage, faithfulness, and commitment.
<b>Stevenson</b> “The Role of Racial Socialization in Relation to Parenting Practices and Youth Behavior: An Exploratory Analysis	Racism awareness teaching	<b>Main themes:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Spiritual and religious coping – use spirituality in coping with problems</li> <li>2. Extended family caring; importance of extended family in rearing children</li> <li>3. Cultural pride reinforcement</li> </ol>
<b>Thomas &amp; Speight (1999)</b> Socialization patterns differ according to types of race messages conveyed through socializing processes	<b>Mainstream</b>  <b>Minority Experience</b>  <b>Black Cultural Practices</b>	<b>Self-development messages</b> Importance of education, achievement in school, hard work  <b>Egalitarian messages</b> Focus on universals and humanist values; do not emphasize racial differences  <b>Racial barrier messages:</b> Provides awareness of racism, prejudice with importance of treating others fairly  <b>Racial identity messages</b> Racial pride, African heritage, familial and cultural heritage

Table 5 (Continued)

Study	Race Socialization Pattern	Race Message
<p><b>Thompson, Anderson, &amp; Bakeman (2000)</b> Duality of socialization for Black families</p> <p>Teach children how to survive in the outside hostile world &amp; to instill them with a positive racial identity</p> <p>Black children need to be able to imitate White culture whether or not they actually agree or not.</p>	<p>Parents in difficult position of warning children about racial dangers without overwhelming them or being over-protective</p> <p>Messages fall within two types of race socializing patterns:</p> <p><b>Active socialization</b></p> <p><b>Protective socialization</b></p>	<p>Parents give to their children particular meanings about race; they teach children what race means</p> <p>Race messages fall into 4 categories</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warnings about struggles they will face as a result of being Black.</li> <li>2. Attempts to instill pride in African American culture</li> <li>3. Universal &amp; humanist messages</li> <li>4. No messages about race; race neutral</li> </ol>
<p><b>Thornton (1997)</b> Foundations of coping = provide children with love, sense of security, help them obtain a good education; develop tough skin, high levels of tolerance, self-pride, self-respect</p> <p><u>Triple Quandary:</u> Mainstream, minority, cultural domains; regardless of class all African Americans have to navigate all three domains at some level</p>	<p><b>Mainstream</b> Work hard and be respectful to everyone no matter what color they are</p> <p><b>Minority</b> <i>What should you do when a White person makes an inappropriate racial joke?</i></p> <p><b>Black Cultural Expression</b> <i>Who was Carter G. Woodson?</i></p>	<p>Parents see primary role as that of teaching life skills; convey importance of ambition, respect; transcend race issues: race neutral; personal self-esteem</p> <p>Focus on minority status and coping with racial discrimination: prepare children for hostile environment; how to cope with regular discrimination</p> <p>Focus on cultural history rooted in West African traditions; family/group history</p>

Coard and Sellars' (2005) article, "African American Families as a Context for Racial Socialization" also assisted my understanding about the role of racial socialization. I have reproduced their analysis as part of this study (see Table 6).

Lastly, my study briefly discusses the complexity about the changing dynamics of African American families that Tucker and James (2005) list as: variation in family forms, more people have never married, increased divorce rates, singlehood is more prevalent, couples are more likely to cohabitate, births to Black teenagers have declined dramatically, more diverse living arrangements for children, married Black women have fewer children, more older persons live alone, and more interracial families (pp. 90-93). In Tucker and James' (2005) article, "New Families, New Functions: Postmodern African American Families in Context," they point out that families have generally become less kin based:

By necessity, family roles have had to be renegotiated and reconstructed when functions dictated by the "modern" nuclear model were unattainable, inappropriate or no longer desirable. For example, many African American women will never become wives in the traditional sense (i.e., legal marriage, due in large part to sociostructural factors outside their control, but increasingly also owing to personal choice. Yet their roles in their family systems are crucial. Postmodern African American family roles display a fluidity and, in some sense, a freedom that was not characteristic of Black family life earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (p. 90)

Given these trends in the state of African American families, a BFW lens assists our comprehension in connecting the broad scope of the life experiences to daily life, where for example, the family gathers occasionally in the homeplace. Within the construct of the racial socialization as used in the sociocultural research I examined in this section, three significant themes surfaced: education, resistance, and family.

Similar to the humanities' section, the first theme provided a particular



**Table 6**  
***Racial Socialization Themes Identified by Authors***

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Spencer (1983)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Concerns about educational success</li> <li>2. Childrearing about race, racism, and discrimination</li> <li>3. Childrearing about gender concerns</li> <li>4. Knowledge of Black history for child and parent</li> <li>5. Childrearing about civil rights</li> </ol>
Boykin & Toms (1985)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mainstream societal values</li> <li>2. Minority status</li> <li>3. Black cultural context</li> </ol>
Peters (1985)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching children to survive</li> <li>2. Self-respect and pride</li> <li>3. Nonreciprocity of fair play</li> <li>4. Getting a good education</li> <li>5. Expressing love</li> </ol>
Bowman & Howard (1985)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Racial barriers</li> <li>2. Self-development</li> <li>3. Ethnic pride</li> <li>4. Egalitarianism</li> </ol>
Thornton (1997)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Racial Pride</li> <li>2. Black heritage</li> <li>3. Good citizenship/moral virtues</li> <li>4. Achievement/hard work</li> <li>5. Acceptance of one's race</li> <li>6. Presence of blocked opportunities</li> <li>7. Religious principles</li> <li>8. Peaceful coexistence with Whites</li> <li>9. Acceptance of self (non-race-related)</li> </ol>
Jeter (1994)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prodominant culture socialization</li> <li>2. Proethnic culture socialization</li> <li>3. Confounded culture socialization</li> <li>4. Raceless culture socialization</li> </ol>
Stevenson (1994b)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Spiritual and religious coping</li> <li>2. Extended family caring</li> <li>3. Cultural pride reinforcement</li> <li>4. Racism awareness teaching</li> </ol>
Hughes & Chen (1999)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cultural socialization</li> <li>2. Preparation for future bias</li> <li>3. Promoting racial mistrust</li> <li>4. Egalitarianism</li> </ol>
Stevenson (2003)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discrimination alertness</li> <li>2. Antagonism coping</li> <li>3. Cultural pride reinforcement</li> <li>4. Cultural legacy appreciation</li> <li>5. Mainstream fitting</li> </ol>
Coard, Wallace, et al. (2004)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Racism preparation</li> <li>2. Racial equality</li> <li>3. Racial achievement</li> <li>4. Racial pride</li> </ol>

ontological view about the importance of education that includes the duality of socialization, coping strategies necessary for survival in a racist world, and juxtaposes Black cultural values against an Eurocentric environment. The second theme, resistance, shows how educational practices at home function to disrupt the stereotypes, myths, and other misnomers about African Americans that circulate in the dominant society. The third theme provides an analysis of the Black family as protector, teacher, and provider, again, from an institutional perspective.

### *The History of Family Reunions*

Lund argued there are two roots of family reunions in the United States (U.S.). One root of the family reunion began when Scottish and Scott-Irish immigrants settled and continued their 18<sup>th</sup>-century tradition of a 1- or 2-day religious gathering outdoors. The second route resulted from the abolition of slavery. African American family reunions have been traced back to the emancipation, when reunions were organized by former slaves from a particular area or plantation (Auslander, 2002; Frazier, 1939; Gutman, 1976; Herskovits, 1958). Auslander (2002) argued that the roots of Black family reunions were seen when exslaves frequently placed advertisements in newspapers in an attempt to find family members from whom they had been separated. Vargus (1997) argued that the elimination of slavery in the south “helped give birth to the [Black family] reunion.” According to Vargus, after emancipation, Blacks were trying to find both blood kin as well as “men and women who had acted as surrogate parents to them on the plantation;” thus, extending the notion of “family” beyond blood. Criswell (2000-2004) argued that this pattern included “nonblood” or fictive kin and appears to persist

in current African American family reunions. Chatters, Taylor, and Jayakodey (1994) defined fictive kin as individuals who are usually treated like relatives but who are not related by blood or marriage.

### *Black Family Reunion Movement*

According to Crichton (1998):

...African American reunions go back to shortly after the Civil War, when families broken by slavery, scattered by the war, and dislocated by Emancipation (which left many free but homeless) could at last reunite in 1869 during the Great Jubilee year. Later, the Great Migration, which took place during and after World War II, split many families right down the middle, with half still in southern hometowns and the other half up North finding opportunity in large industrial centers. Southern homecomings brought together northern and southern siblings and cousins, mingling small-town values and big-city manners in the warm embrace of the supportive, extended family, the hometown church, and down-home cooking.

Meaningful as these celebrations of family and ancestors were, the African American family reunion movement didn't take off as a commercial phenomenon until the 1970s and 80s, when vacation travel opportunities opened up for Black families. "We just would not have felt comfortable booking our family into a resort unless we knew for a fact that other Black families had gone there and been comfortable," recalls one African American reunion organizer...

As previously mentioned in the aforementioned discussion, Alex Haley was a major contributor to the notion of the Black Family Reunion Movement. Crichton writes:

*Roots*...inspired Black families to learn more about their extended families and collective past. Black family genealogy boomed and with it the desire for cousins to meet cousins and to close up and heal divided families.

In the mid-1980s, Dr. Dorothy I. Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women, launched the Black Family Reunion Celebration to fortify and celebrate the historical strengths and traditional values of the Black family...

African American family reunions now account for half of all American reunions, and they paved the way for the large, highly organized reunion that is a staple of the landscape today. African American reunions are a major economic factor, as well – it's estimated that 70 percent of nonbusiness travel by African Americans during the summer is reunion-related. Because many African Americans view reunions more as special vacations than as family obligations, families are ready to make a strong financial commitment toward attending. "Your not just pouring money into some casual amusement," says reunion goer Audrey Walker. "The feeling of strength and togetherness you get out of it pays you back tenfold." (Crichton, 1995, p.16)

See Table 3 for a reproduction of Crichton's (1995) analysis of the four basic reunion types as part of this study.

Vargus (1997) drew on the scholarship of Joanne and Elmer Martin's (1978) book, *Black Extended Families* who detail many of the reasons for the deterioration of the extended family and the loss of kinship ties even when families live in the same city...the impact of urbanization and government programs on extended family functions (p. 2). Vargus argues that the revival of extended families can be seen through "the reunions." She writes that "reunions" are "a catalyst for change" (p. 2). Likewise, McAdoo (1981) postulated a process whereby an individual from the South migrated to a northern city, settled, and then sponsored other relatives and friends as they moved to the city. The process "ensured that a person who moved to an area was not totally isolated, but was met with an existing supportive network that would give assistance until a niche had been found" (p.157). As families left the South in hopes of greater opportunities in the North, some family members were naturally left behind. Many northern African Americans frequently refer to their kin "down home" with a sense of nostalgia and longing (Auslander, 2002). Along these lines, it has been noted that Alex Haley's *Roots* (as well as the television mini series that followed) may have supported the interest that African Americans have in genealogy (Auslander, 2002; Lund, 2002).

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

#### *Reflexivity: A Researcher's Perspective*

I began my research with an initial study of Newton family members' experiences in northeastern Pennsylvania (Wilkes-Barre) and the rural section of Virginia (Warsaw) in search of public records that corroborate the participants' stories. The results of the research revealed the multigenerational knowledge – both oral and written stories about my maternal family – that gave voice not only to the ancestors but also the living members who are the offspring of the Newton family. For example, I interviewed several members of the family (*Elders*: aunts, uncles, and cousins) which led to inter- and intragenerational stories that provided different nuances and richness around issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The stories and themes were congruent with the overall family narratives, in general. This process led to further understandings about me and the pedagogies of my family that I felt were incumbent upon me to share and to have validated. Most importantly, I believe the Newton family stories model the rich experiences that many other Black families share.

I was raised in a small northeastern city. The population encompassed 75,000 Whites and only 500 families that were African American in 1964 when I graduated from high school. From early elementary school to the 12th grade as I recall, I was the only “colored” girl in my classes. I remember that I was the only

African American girl in my high school class of 375 students at graduation. The only other “Negro,” in my class was an upper-middle class, light-skinned boy (Olin Morris who could almost pass for White and whom was certainly accepted in White circles). I never had an African American teacher, and in later years as a student in the community college system in Los Angeles experienced culture shock in a diverse classroom with an African American teacher. As I recalled, my southern Black girlfriends were experiencing the same type of culture shock having been socialized in segregated schools in the South. In contrast, their lack of experiences with White teachers compared to mine with Black teachers.

Thus, the initial family reunion project was an epiphany, since it aroused unconscious emotions about my family socialization in a predominantly White region framed against the U. S. historical context of racism. The idea of race and racism is juxtaposed against contemporary issues, such as the popular culture that the Newton family *Youngster* generation, in particular, faces. How do these issues affect my study? How do I represent the multigenerational voices of my family members? How does the challenge of racism impact past and future generations? Each thread of information divulged in the study becomes an integral piece of a larger historical context that lays the groundwork for the next generation. The knowledge gained about *Black family pedagogies* learned in the dissertation process is not only crucial to analyzing data about my family’s socialization, but also, it adds to the Black family historical contexts and knowledge production systems at large. Bringing all of this together from an African American family perspective, I believe, is my final challenge.

As both the researcher and the researched, I am an important factor in the study,

not only as a family member; but also as the scholar bringing the project to fruition. My academic experiences span 15 years and include initial interviews with the *Elders* of the Newton family that have continued throughout my academic career.

I was fortunate enough to have a professor at Los Angeles Southwest College who provided students an opportunity to take a Saturday excursion to the Latter Day Saints (LDS) Genealogy Library in West Los Angeles (L.A.). Unbeknownst to me at the time, I would pursue a doctorate degree at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah, the home of the largest genealogical library in the world. It was there in West L.A. while learning to use genealogical tools to research the Newton family histories when an epiphany occurred – the moment of discovering documents that listed my great grandmother Mary Ellen Newton and my second cousins Virginia, Pearl, and my youngest grand aunt all whom resided with my great grandmother Mary Ellen. Remembrance of those stories that Grandma Emma told me as a little girl connected immediately! The stories served as concrete evidence about the Newton family's past existence and, for me, was mind-boggling! Initially, my goal was to retrieve documents about my grandmother, Lou Emma (who during the time period researched had migrated from Warsaw to Washington, D.C. and thus, was excluded from the census documents that listed her siblings and cousins who resided with her mother, Mary Ellen). I started this journey looking for genealogical records about my grandmother Emma and instead, found information about my great grandmother, Mary Ellen.

My second encounter with family narratives occurred on the campus of University of California, Irvine (UCI), where I was enrolled in a class entitled, *Asian American Life Stories* while attending the Universidad de Michoacan located in Morelia,

Mexico during the summer of 1997. I spent the summer in Mexico fulfilling a second year Spanish language requirement at UCI. The description on the university catalog about the *Life Stories* class caught my interest. While in Mexico, I contacted the professor teaching the class at UCI, and I learned that the class was designed specifically for Asian Americans to research their life histories; however, the professor invited me to enroll in the class and center my African American roots as the historical context of my research. The goal of the class was for each student to produce a 100-page book by the end of the semester. Thus, the formulation of *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book* began.

By the time I was accepted into a doctoral program at the University of Utah, the idea of a research study about my family's oral tradition, [re]unification and [re]construction of my family's stories had crystallized; therefore, it was inevitable the topic of my dissertation project thematically would interrogate Newton family narratives.

### *S I L E N C E: "Airing Dirty Laundry" – One Black*

#### *Researcher's Perspective on Family Matters*

From the onset of the study, I struggled with the researcher's versus the family's voice. Which voice is the omniscient one that guides the study and, unabashedly, informs the audience about experiences in the Newton family, while simultaneously showing empathy, particularity, and also guarding the family's confidentiality? In retrospect, what I discerned from many of the participants was that they did not express many negatives, which I believe corroborate Black racial socialization practices of



determining what is important and what is divulged in public. Most importantly, the participants' hypersensitivity that this IS a family member's dissertation is at play here. Subconsciously, the participants are socialized not to divulge negative family situations. As I pondered this dilemma, I remembered the day that I interviewed Ron and Telisa at my mother's home. Both were extremely nervous about the interviews, and I remembered Telisa commented that it reminded her of taking a test at school. So, I was challenged with bringing an element of normalcy into the process; in this case, providing a comfortable setting that completely relaxed the participants enough so that I could not only conduct the interview; but also, engage the participants enough so the dialogue would be natural and easy. Thus, I struggled with the notions of voice, interpretation (such as analyzing poetry of 1997 within a 2011 context), and the content of the narratives (i.e., which subject matter should be revealed). All of these issues were direct challenges of being a researcher and family member. Thus, in the final analysis, I determined the importance of respecting the participants through selection of third-person voices in the below-mentioned vignettes – short stories centering the silence – in order to protect the participants' privacy.

The philosophy of many Black families is that family business is not meant for public knowledge. Tensions exist around what is meant for private consumption or family matters versus what can be divulged in public. Therefore, many issues are “kept in the closet” so to speak. In other words, many untruths exist that are closeted and never resolved as a result. It is an unspoken law within many African American families, because in my opinion, shame is attached to many of our lived experiences. Therefore many African Americans' “family problems” are not discussed. It is very natural that no

one talks. So, to bring problems forth or to intervene in negative situations means that you have broken the silence or crossed the line and there is a consequence. Namely, a rupture is caused in close relationships that a relative had experienced since his or her birth into the family. In my Grandma Emma's family this is the case with a few strains of the Newton family that none of the participants mentioned. The following discussion revealed several areas where silence existed surrounding certain issues, because either they did not know about the stories or chose not to divulge the information. Therefore, the discussion below included my perspective as researcher/family member about the issue of silence, and begins to unravel some of the complexities surrounding disruptions in the Newton family. I recalled five ruptures that existed: a funeral controversy, a miscommunication that led to an *Elder's* alienation from the family, and issues surrounding alcoholism, abandonment and ageism.

### *A Pauper's Funeral*

An *Elder's* alienation resulted from a situation that caused dissonance within the family. Silence existed around the personal story and the interrelationships of this particular strain of the Newton family. The *Elder* was alienated from the family by choice, because a rift existed between mother and daughter (the *Elders*). As the story is told, the mother was "taken advantaged of" at a very young age (12 or 13) by the neighbor, a White man. As a biracial child, the *Elder* (daughter) always believed that the mother loved her brother (a full Black) more than the daughter and therefore gave him preferential treatment. This caused a rift in the mother/daughter relationship until the mother's death. As a result, before the matriarch (the *Elder's* aunt) passed away, she

became her sister's caretaker. After the matriarch's death, her youngest daughter inherited this role. When the mother died, the daughter came to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania to claim her mother's body and proceeded to make funeral arrangements for a pauper's burial (even though the mother had prepaid her burial expenses in advance to have a *proper funeral*<sup>16</sup>). The *Elder's* brother passed away many years before. At this point, the extended family (the *Elder's* first cousins) intervened and overrode her decision and buried their aunt properly and with respect. In response to the family's decision, the *Elder* disconnected from the family until a few years before her death.

Many years later, the *Elder's* medical problems prompted a telephone call to an older cousin for assistance with her personal affairs (i.e., her will and living arrangements). The *Elder* did not have any immediate family, since she was a widow and childless. The *Elder* lived in isolation in New England and was dependent upon her friends to handle her business. As it turned out, they swindled the *Elder* out of thousands of dollars – her life's savings, because they thought the *Elder* did not have any family. In 2006, the *Elder's* cousin from the West, a woman in her early 80s at the time (the *Elder*, herself, was in her early 90s – a 10-year difference between their ages) flew to New England and physically moved her cousin to the West to live with her until the *Elder's* death.

The epiphany of this story is that before the *Elder's* death, she requested to be buried with her mother and the other Newton relatives in a Pennsylvania<sup>17</sup> cemetery.

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<sup>16</sup> The distinction between a *pauper's funeral* and a *proper burial* is . . .

<sup>17</sup> This cemetery is the site where most of the Newton relatives in East are buried. When this *Elder* died in 2007, I attended her funeral remember stepping lightly across the

### *Who Said What?*

I believe that the tensions existent within the Newton family were/are uncontrollable and part of the human condition. For example, some controversies occurred because people do not communicate easily, particularly if there is a sense of taboo surrounding the controversies. Miscommunication has resulted in a void in Newton family relationships many times over and again. Nonetheless, miscommunication is only one part of the complexities that propagated old and new estrangements in the family. An example of this is a current situation with yet another *Elder* (who by the way is unmarried and does not have any offspring, either). No one in the family seems to know or understand this *Elders*' reasoning for her alienation. Most importantly, no one ever talks about her.

### *A Family Divided*

The family was split. And, the division occurred primarily between two sisters – the oldest and youngest ones. The silence is deafening around this subject. No one relative in the family, as I recall, even acknowledges the split, let alone trying to explain the reasons behind it. Therefore, as researcher and for the purposes of the study, I have attempted to detail the story to reveal certain nuances in family politics. Revelation is seen in the short story below and helps us to ascertain a little information about the estrangement of two sisters in the family.

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graves out of respect. Unbeknownst to me at the time, that I was stepping over the grave sites of grandma and grandpa's and many more family relatives. I decided right then and there that when I die, I wanted to be buried here in the East with my relatives, even though I have spent a lifetime away from this place. My mother, too, has already reserved and paid for her burial.

*“Uh, uh, uh!,” one of us kids said, motioning ahead in the direction of the two people across the street.*

It was Grandma’s sister. She and her boyfriend were cuttin’ up again.

*“Look it!” There she goes again!,” someone said.*

My cousins, my siblings and I would sit on the front porch steps of Grandma’s house many hot days in the summertime giggling and pointing to the two people across the street *puttin’ on a show over there*. We would sit in awe and stare at the woman especially. She would perform: cursing, dancing on the sidewalk and even lifting up her dress. The man standing beside her would egg her on,

*“Go on! Do it!”*

Us kids would laugh and taunt her. The more we laughed the more outrageous she acted. We knew this woman was related to us. And we knew the man was her boyfriend. Uh-uh-uh! Both stone drunk, actin’ up across the street from Grandma’s house.

*“You Sister, and you (pointing at the boyfriend), go on now, stop actin’ up.” Grandma would say pointing her finger towards them.*

*“Hush up you kids,” Grandma would warn us. “There’s nothing funny. You should be praying for her instead of laughing,” she would say. “That is nothing but the devil.”*

Grandma in all of her piety and seriousness stood on the front porch of that old Victorian house on State Street *pointing her finger at her sister and praying for her all at once*. This goes on a few minutes and finally Grandma opens her Bible and reads from Psalms. Grandma always ended this ritual by taking a box of Morton salt and throwing handfuls around the front porch *to ward off evil spirits*.

Many Blacks believed in the spirit world and were very superstitious. My Grandmother was no exception. On the one hand, she was very religious and on the other hand, she was very superstitious . . . a kind of contradiction, but not unusual for Black folks (and some Whites, too).

As kids back in the 1950s, we thought Sister and her boyfriend were funny. We were too young to comprehend the subject of alcoholism, nor were we interested. But, in retrospect, alcoholism divided the family and it was a very sad time. The split occurred between Grandma’s family and Sister’s. Neither family ever talks about it – it is like a *big* secret.

Mom said the problem could have started with an incident in Grandma's kitchen:

*"It was the only time in my life that I saw Mama mad enough to fight," Mom said. It happened in Grandma's kitchen where Mom's youngest cousin was sitting quietly at the table watching her aunt and her mother. Grandma and Sister were arguing because Sister was signifying. She called Grandma a lot of names and cursed her. Sister had a lot of mouth and she disrespected Grandma.*

*Mom said, "Grandma got so angry that she balled the fingers of her hand into a fist and started moving towards Sister."*

Grandma actually hit Sister up side her head before Mom could stop her.

*"No, Mama," said Mom standing between the two women, "it's not worth it. You'll go to jail. Why do not you put her away. Why let her act crazy like this all over the streets of city?"*

By this time, Mom was between Grandma and Sister, stopping the almost fight. Meanwhile, little cousin sat quietly at the kitchen table looking at her aunt and her mother and never said a word. From that day on Sister was barred from Grandma's house.

That was when the two families split. Mom wondered why little cousin just sat there and did not try to reason with her mother to stop insulting Grandma. I thought, as Mom told me the story, what a precarious position for little cousin. Here she was staying in my Grandma's house with her baby and her mother starts signifyin'. You see, Sister was little cousin's mother. Little cousin witnessed the whole incident. I wondered what little cousin thought about when her mother and her aunt were about to fight? Did little cousin's quiet demeanor that day condone her mother's behavior? Did she approve of all of the [negative] talk about her mother?

When my mother told me this story, I was absolutely amazed because since I was old enough to remember until her death, I never saw my Grandmother angry enough to fight... ANYONE!!!

Years later, when Sister stopped drinking, that other person that consumed her when she drank was gone.

*"Mother started going to church and she even helped me around the house with my kids," little cousin said.*

But, for me, I will always remember that Sister never looked right when she was sober, probably because the images that I internalized as a child remained in my psyche. We

were so used to seeing Sister drunk most of the time and acting up. From that day to this one, I do not think my family ever openly discussed the circumstances about the division between the two families. Mom and I did speculate about it, though.

*Sister was never the same after she married into the Bigg family, Mom said. That family never accepted her . . . Mom heard that the Bigg family never accepted Sister and believed this had an adverse affect on her. But, we'll never know because Sister is gone now, and so is little cousin . . . sadly enough, there is no one to set the record straight.*

Even though Sister was the youngest of Grandma's siblings, she was the first one to pass away.

After sobriety, according to little cousin, Sister found peace in being with her children and grandchildren in the end, though.

— WARSAW, 1997, pp. 48-52

The Newton family came together at my wedding in 1972. I remember that my mother telephoned to ask who should be invited. This question was critical, since these two strains of the Newton family were completely alienated from each other. The question my mother asked was pivotal and an indirect way of asking me for direction, knowing that depending on my answer, the family could come together again and become one unit. I responded that everyone in the family should be invited. And according to little cousin, "The only...time the family was brought together was for your wedding Cheri, and I know that my immediate family waited to see if we were going to be invited, and we were."

*"That's when the family in Wilkes-Barre finally came together."*

— WARSAW, 1997, p. 47

I remembered that almost everyone in the Newton family came to my wedding.

### *Where's Pops?*

This member of the *Offspring* generation was estranged from the family at an early age, and therefore was not raised in the city with the rest of the *Offspring* generation. Related to the Newton family through a paternal connection and conceived when these *Elders* (the parents) were very young, the couple never married. In fact, it is told that this *Offspringer* was given away, therefore, she was alienated from the Newton family. Nevertheless, this member of the *Offspring* generation and I connected in the West, where I had migrated in 1964, 2 months after high school graduation when I received the call. I remember that it was the happiest day in my life – to be reunited with literally a “long lost cousin.” We cultivated a close relationship after that call. My relationship with this *Offspringer* resulted in recognition of her as one of my dearest friends and relatives in adulthood. As a result, I visited her on several occasions when I had an opportunity to become acquainted with my little (or second) cousins, her children. In later years, once the family organized reunions, this *Offspringer* reconnected to the Newton family and participated in many of its gatherings. However, one of the tensions she had to navigate with her biological father is their personal relationship, many times nonexistent between the two. That challenge never materialized before his death.

### *Singlehood: Living Alone*

Another rupture in the family occurred between a family member whom I credit, as being one of the most influential people in my life and who, in part, is responsible for me achieving a doctorate in philosophy (along with my mother and grandmother). The



relative, an *Elder*, is single, childless, and never married. So, in theory, there was a belief among the nieces and nephews that she was like an *othermother*. But, what happens when familial roles lapse, and the *Elders* become incapacitated both mentally and/or physically? Who provides eldercare especially in the case of those unmarried, childless relatives? Whom can these relatives trust and/or depend on? How can family protect them? And, what if they do not want that protection? The notion of singlehood coupled with eldercare in African American families with aging relatives is another concern in the study. How does ageism intersect family situations positively? How does the family foster love and respect – the very values the *Elders* have instilled in us – in a way that is continually inclusive? How do *Elders* function in family politics? Are their expectations of the family as caretakers valid? Should the family take on caretaking roles, reversing the functions that many of them held proudly? And if so, is the relationship a reciprocal one? In the *Elders* generation of the Newton family, there are/were four single female relatives and one male that I know about whom have never married and are childless.

For approximately 60 years, I had a wonderful relationship with this relative until I discovered a secret that was hidden from the family. After discovery, I proceeded to intervene “to make things better,” since my philosophy requires me to take a proactive approach to a potentially threatening situation rather than no position at all. But, tensions within the family arose. I was challenged by the *Elders* generation, who believed that one does not interfere in another’s personal business. I came to terms with myself and my decision to intervene in this situation, knowing that I would be criticized and ostracized by those family members who aligned themselves with the *Elders*’

perspective. Clearly, in my opinion, a “generation gap” existed between the *Elders* and *Offspring* generations. At this point of the study, I am concerned because I now believe that this situation undermines the very thesis of the study – *my F A M I L Y!* What I have learned in recent years is that there is a silence in the Newton family around situations with certain relatives and I, in fact, am forbidden to discuss it. Yet, it seems hypocritical. How do I come to terms with myself and this issue as it relates to the study?

My memories of this relative begin at a very, very young age. Up to this point in my life, the relationship with the relative has been an excellent one. I am convinced that there are certain things in life for which we have no control. The current situation with the relative is one of them. If I had a chance to intervene again, I say “yes” I would, but differently. One of the critiques I have as a member of the *Offspring* generation is that we are a generation of many firsts: we burned our bras for the cause, we are/were activists and yet liberal-minded in many ways that generations preceding us were not. Our quality of life soared because of the values of past generations. One thing for sure, is that we are interventionists – a very different stance from, for instance, the *Elders* generation. As such, I think we tend to *stick our feet into things* and *raise cane* in ways that no other generation has ever done. With that being said, I do not know how I can discuss the details of the situation with this relative without betraying a “trust.” As it now stands, I have said too much, but my point is that I learned much from, experienced many firsts with, and will forever have much love for this relative even though currently, a relationship does not exist between us. The first time I went on a vacation, I ate in a restaurant, went to a concert, visited the sites in the big city, and oh

so much more –all are attributed to the relative. How do I remember this relative, given all that she has done for me even though as I speak about this fractured relationship, I feel sprigs of resentment and hurt, because my intervention, I believe, was the RIGHT thing to do. I believe that my spirit will always thrive on the positive light the relative brought to not only my life but to my siblings and cousins. I reconcile these emotions in the conclusion of the study with a story reminiscent of the relative’s role in the Newton family. The [re]telling of the story fosters the epitome of family – the essence of what it means to be family. Lastly, the short story pays homage to this relative.

So, in the final analysis, the question becomes how does one resolve or reconcile problems in the family. I attempted to answer this question in the conclusion of the study.

### *Qualitative Ethnographic Problem-Solving Chart*

A “Qualitative Ethnographic Problem-Solving Chart” (see Table 7) was developed to assist me in conceptualizing the constructs or themes of the study to justify why I am making this inquiry. The chart, in my opinion, demystifies the process of interrogation, development of a literature review, and data collection. Successful integration of the various components of a dissertation proposal means “making the connections.” In other words, the research questions must be aligned with the literature review and the data gathering strategies (DGS). This process yields a rich, multi-faceted ethnographic study. Thus, an element of conceptualization for the study becomes formulaic and is an effective means of piecing together the various components. The DGS formula equals or is the sum of the research questions plus the data gathering strategies plus the literature

**Table 7**  
**Qualitative Ethnographic Problem-Solving Chart**

Questions	Literature Review	Data Gathering Strategies
<p>The following research questions will guide my study:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What African American racial socialization practices, values, and beliefs appear in African American literature, Black racial socialization research, and family reunion literature?</li> <li>2. How do the African American literature, literature on African American racial socialization and the literature on family reunions inform our understanding of Black pedagogies of the home and racial socialization of African American children?</li> <li>3. What are the Newton family's stories that foster family youth with racial socialization and internalization of cultural values and beliefs at family reunions and in the home and community?</li> <li>4. What purposes do family reunions serve in their lives? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What values and beliefs are embedded in the stories told at family reunions?</li> <li>b. What are the purposes of the stories?</li> <li>c. What are the different kinds of stories told at reunions or in family homes?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><i>I will draw from three (3) bodies of research:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <i><b>African American novels</b> will show how knowledge is produced and what forms of the oral tradition are being used, what themes surface, and how these themes are being internalized.</i></li> <li>b. <i>The <b>research in the Social Sciences</b> will be used to show how racial socialization fits into the "big picture;" i.e., the void in educational systems, the importance of racial socialization at home for Blacks youth, &amp; explains how assimilation subordinates Black identities.</i></li> <li>c. <i>The <b>literature on Black family reunions</b> will provide an historical context that delineates the purpose for Black family reunions as it shows how, when and why it functions, what purpose the Black family reunion serves in the lives of African Americans &amp; will show howl the process of knowledge production reveals itself in the process of before the event occurs.</i></li> </ol>	<p>The following include the five (5) sources of data for this case study:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oral stories (and written texts derived from them)</li> <li>2. Life notes such as personal narratives correspondence (including emails) constructed by various family members, and photographs and artifacts</li> <li>3. Interviews</li> <li>4. Researcher reflective narrative of the Family Reunion(s)</li> <li>5. Blogs of the <i>Youngsters'</i> generation to connect their meanings of family stories and knowledge about previous generations</li> </ol>

review in which ALL must match.

### *Research Design – Case Study*

Educational research and practices that reflect a cultural paradigm emphasize cultural solidarity, education for self-reliance in the African American community, and specific ways in which cultural knowledge, practices and values that characterize the historic and contemporary African American experience can be drawn upon to improve the education of African Americans. (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 1995, p. 361)

The excerpt from *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book* that I wrote implies the importance of stories, the homeplace, and the relationships that exist within a family. This chapter “writes lives” of my ancestral grandmothers and their homeplaces through a collection of stories provided by family members across the generations. In writing the lives of my ancestral grandmothers, a rich historical context has been provided also that frames each of the stories. The stories as constructs in the study were conceptualized as a result of Bell-Scott’s (1994) work (as part of a BWF perspective), whose objective for writing *Life Notes* was based on the following:

1. to honor nameless [females] recording their lives in the face of enormous disadvantages;
2. to share the rich experiences lost when our diversity is ignored;
3. to authenticate our ability as self-defining women who can speak for ourselves;
4. to encourage other generations to write for self-knowledge, empowerment, and posterity. (p. 18)

Case studies are defined as reports of research about a specific organization, program, or process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 164). Stake (2005) defines case

study as the empirical study of human activity. He further contends that case study “concentrates on experiential knowledge of its social, political, and other contexts” (p. 444). Stake identifies three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use an instrumental case study that is singular and is a “bounded system.” According to Stake (2005), instrumental case studies are undertaken “if a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization...case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied” and he emphasizes designing the study to optimize understanding the case instead of generalizing. For Stake, the case is a “bounded system” that is both a “process of inquiry” and the “product” of it. As such, Stake lists five requirements for optimizing understanding the case: issue choice, triangulation, experiential knowledge, contexts, and activities (p. 444). Similarly, Merriam (2001) equates the case study with fieldwork or unit of study. She uses Kim’s (1994) definition of case study as the research process or “empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context...” (p. 27).

### *Description of the Participants*

Important to the study are not only the stories but also the storytellers – those generations of folk, living and dead who contributed to the transmission of knowledge. The following section introduces key figures in subsequent generations (namely, the *Ancestors*, *Elders*, *Offspring*, and *Youngsters*) that either acted as griots or were simply participants in the storytelling process.

*The Ancestors*

*Ellen Newton (1<sup>st</sup> Generation).* As the story is told orally and as I describe in  
WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book (1997):

*My great, great, great grandmother was named Ellen Newton, for whom “not much is known ‘cept that she had five children one of them named Isabelle” which is the strain of the family from which we hail...there is no mention of a man.*

Ellen Newton was born and died in Warsaw, Virginia (c.1830); the exact dates are unknown.

*Isabelle Newton*<sup>18</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> Generation). The story continues:

*My great, great grandmother, Isabelle Newton, “the tall, straight, dark-skinned woman with high cheekbones said to come from the Cherokees...who was seven years old when Lincoln emancipated the slaves” and who was on a plantation down South when her oldest brother Robert Bailey “went down there and got her and brought her back to Warsaw, Virginia.” Isabelle became a midwife and “birthed all the babies Black and White,” in the Richmond County area, saved her money and bought the Newton family’s first homestead in Warsaw, Virginia.*

Isabelle Newton was born in Warsaw, Virginia c.1850 and passed away there in January 1946.

*Mary Ellen Newton (3<sup>rd</sup> Generation).* The story continues now for two generations:

*My great grandmother, Mary Ellen Newton, had seven children that were raised on the homestead. In fact, it is told that Isabelle divided the land between the two of them; the property survived two fires set on it by the White folks who didn’t want the Newtons on the land, because the creek was located on their side of the land. Later, when Lou Emma was married with children, Mary Ellen would send her oldest daughter food products*

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<sup>18</sup> Isabelle Newton’s age is listed in the 1870 and 1880 U.S. Census records as 45 and 54. There are no records that list her birth, but we believe that she was born in Richmond County, Virginia. She was killed in January, 1946, when “the white folks set fire to her house (for the third time), because the creek was located on her property.” They wanted her land. Isabelle’s name is listed several ways in the various censuses: Isabella, Isabel, Isabelle and Belle.

*from Virginia through the mail to Pennsylvania to help Lou Emma cope with survival while raising seven children.*

Mary Ellen Newton was born in Warsaw, Virginia in 1875 and died in 1957.

*Lou Emma Newton [Patrick-Smith-Choice] (4<sup>th</sup> Generation).* As the “holder of the information” about our ancestors, Lou Emma was truly a griot – a principal storyteller in the Newton family – following in the footsteps of both her mother Mary Ellen, and particularly, her grandmother Isabelle. Through her storytelling, Emma kept the spirit of the family and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge alive. Lou Emma continues the storytelling tradition,

*My Grandma, Lou Emma Newton (Patrick Smith Choice), didn't want her offspring to be born below the Mason-Dixon Line<sup>19</sup> and therefore migrated to Washington, D.C. In Washington, she found employment as a “domestic” in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, where she migrated. Lou Emma married three times: 1) to her first husband, Louis Patrick and had four children: Bernice, Marion, and fraternal twins Louis and Lawrence Patrick; 2) to her second husband Fred Smith and had three children: Lorraine, Mary Ellen and Robert Smith; and 3) Grandma's third husband William Choice was the only grandfather that I knew and who assisted my grandmother in raising her seven children. My grandmother earned a beautician's license in scalp treatment and hair culture from Poro College in Philadelphia on October 13, 1919. In 1948, she hit the numbers<sup>20</sup> and*

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<sup>19</sup> Mason-Dixon Line – The dividing line in the pre-Civil War period that was the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania, the slave and free-soil states. Today, the Mason-Dixon Line serves figuratively (i.e., imaginatively or invisibly) as the social and political dividing line between the North and the South (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1978).

This was a common term that I grew up with in the 1950s and 1960s, because Grandma Emma often referred to it, and I viewed it as the underlying reason for her migration from Virginia/Washington D.C. to Pennsylvania. I believe this is where her love for Pennsylvania began, coupled with the fact that it was the site of the Underground Railroad.

<sup>20</sup> Numbers – My grandmother Emma believed that one day she would hit “the *numbers*. The *numbers* is a form of gambling” that supplemented their lifestyles. It is an underground or disenfranchised economy in Black communities in the northeast that



*bought the first homestead (above the Mason-Dixon Line) in Wilkes-Barre where many "Sunday" dinners and all "holiday celebrations" occurred.*

Lou Emma Newton (Patrick-Smith-Choice) was born on May 19, 1894 in Warsaw, Virginia and died on September 2, 1981 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

### *The Elders (5<sup>th</sup> Generation)*

*Bernice [Patrick] Cross and Marion Patrick.* My grandmother's two oldest children, my mother Bernice Cross and my aunt Marion Patrick, told genealogically-derived stories, one orally (just as my Grandmother Emma told it) and the other, a textually written version just as my grandmother spoke it. The stories of my grandmothers (the *Ancestors*) told by my mother and aunt established the genesis of a family tree thus far, and a genealogical context to connect our ancestors to its living

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evolved in urban/poor communities. See Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh's (2006) article in *The Boston Globe* for a scholarly analysis about this type of economy. Further glimpses into the world of numbers playing is seen in the works of Langston Hughes' (1959) "Madam and the Number Writer" and "Numbers," Walter A. Bell's *Harlem Gangs*, and Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma*. Popular culture's new Black cinema produced films such as *Hoodlum* and *The Cotton Club* where Stephanie St. Claire known as the "Queen of Numbers" and her henchman-husband, Ellsworth "Bumpy" Johnson are featured. (The film, *Gangs of New York* (2001) delivers a very descriptive, yet multifaceted perspective on this topic.) The Langston Hughes play, *Little Ham* along with Katherine Butler Jones' play titled *409 Edgcombe Ave*, *The House on Sugar Hill* (2007) and countless blues lyrics connote the relational significance "playing the numbers" had in Black culture.

Grandma Emma had plenty of dream books that she would consult and discuss dreams daily with my grandpa before "putting the numbers in." Consulting "dream books" was part of this culture that is explored in the concept of Grandma's House that I address in this dissertation. Grandma Emma through penny and nickle bets eventually won \$500 and purchased the family's first homestead in the north in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Langston Hughes' works such as the play, "Harlem is full of folks that gamble on dreams and dreamers that gamble" explores the numbers culture. The numbers game caught on quickly among Negroes because a person could bet as little as a penny, and if the number "hit" the rewards were high (as much as 600 to 1) (Ianni, 1974).

members. The genealogically-derived story that was passed along to me by my mother and aunt resonated and inspired me to write “Mama Said” for the Life Stories class that I took at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) that would ultimately result in *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book* later.

Bernice [Patrick] Cross was born in Berwick, Pennsylvania on February 11, 1924 and currently resides in West Covina, California. Marion Patrick was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 3, 1926 and currently resides in Salt Lake City, Utah.

*Viola Jackson.* As evidenced in the introduction, Viola’s storytelling is powerful, because the story itself connects to the values and traditions of the matriarchy and included the Newton family’s work ethic, stability, and revelations about the family’s true spirit of what I called *the essence of family*.

With the death of Virginia Roberts on Palm Sunday in 2007, Viola, who has always resided in Washington, D.C., is inherently the new matriarch of the Newton family, since she is the oldest living person now. A powerful storyteller, Viola’s personal accounts during my January 7, 1997 interview with her were the inspiration for several chapters in the *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book* contextualized from the oral tradition within the family. One of the favorite stories that I wrote, “Matriarchs” that gives homage to our grandmothers as *Women Warriors* was inspired by Viola. Viola’s narratives familiarized me with grandma Isabelle, the family’s homestead in Warsaw, Virginia, and Clarkesville Baptist Church, where many of our ancestors are buried (except Isabelle and Mary Ellen) “who are buried on the homestead in Warsaw, Virginia under the ole apple tree” (Smith, M.E., 1997). An empowering story introduced at the

beginning of the study where Viola refers to our ancestral grandmothers as *Women Warriors* speaks about our ancestral grandmothers' resiliency, survival, and coping strategies.

Viola Jackson was born on April 25, 1923 in Washington, D.C. where she currently resides.

*Virginia Roberts.* Virginia was the matriarch of the Newton family, since she was the oldest living relative during most of the development of this research study. Her personal interview with me on April 28, 1997 provided a glimpse of Warsaw, Virginia and stories about our grandmothers Isabelle, Mary Ellen, and Lou Emma and the homestead where all of them were born and raised. Virginia migrated to Washington, D.C., where she was employed as an elevator operator in The Pentagon. Ultimately, Virginia migrated to Boston, Massachusetts where she retired from John Hancock Insurance Company as an elevator operator. Virginia spent the last months of her life with her first cousin, Bernice Cross, in Southern California where she recently passed away at age 93. Due to a loss of records, Virginia has two dates of births; November 9, 1914 is the reconstructed date.

Virginia Louise [Newton] Roberts was born on September 11, 1913 (the original date) and died on April 1, 2007 while cohabitating with her cousin, Bernice.

*Mary Ellen Smith.* Mary Ellen Smith (a.k.a. Ellen) was one of the principal organizers of the Newton-Patrick-Smith family reunion in that she joined Lorraine, my youngest cousin, Phyllis, and cousin-in-law Rosalie Smith (cousin Lionel's wife) in investigating sites for our first family reunion. Auntie Ellen's storytelling provided knowledge or personal accounts about Grandmother Mary Ellen Newton's migration to

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania during the last years of her life, since Auntie Ellen had an opportunity to live in Warsaw, Virginia briefly with her grandmother Mary Ellen (her namesake).

Mary Ellen Smith was born on March 26, 1934 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania where she currently resides.

*Lena (Newton) Taylor* – my youngest 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin

*Died August 22, 1997*

*15 days before*

*The 1<sup>st</sup> Newton Family Reunion*

*Approximately 115 people attended.*

– *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book*

My cousin, Lena (Newton) Taylor, was a central figure in the orchestration of the first Newton family reunion. She was a leader in that regard for the East-coast Newton families in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, along with my aunts Lorraine Smith, Ellen Smith and her daughter, my 1<sup>st</sup> cousin Phyllis Smith and my 1st cousin Michelle Patrick. Lena who was diagnosed with cancer and actually died approximately 2 weeks before the first Newton Family Reunion in 1997. Lena, one of the youngest members of the *Elders* generation, was born in Warsaw, Virginia and migrated to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania with Grandma Mary Ellen. Therefore, Lena, too, was a “holder of information” that was valuable to the study. Many of the stories about the homestead in Warsaw were passed down by Lena who provided countless glimpses into the lives of our ancestral grandmothers in Virginia.

Lena was born on December 21, 1937 in Warsaw, Virginia and died in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on August 22, 1997.

*The Offspring (6<sup>th</sup> Generation)*

*Paulette Cross* (a.k.a. Cheri). I am Paulette Cross, the great, great, great granddaughter of Ellen Newton; great, great granddaughter of Isabel Newton; great granddaughter of Mary Ellen Newton; granddaughter of Lou Emma Newton; and daughter of Bernice Patrick who remembers the stories. And, as a result, I am walking in my mother's and grandmothers' footsteps by continuing to share the knowledge – those stories – because of them.

I was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on April 28, 1946.

*Darrell and Michelle Patrick*. My cousins, Darrell and Michelle, who are my Uncle Lawrence Patrick's son and daughter, attended most of the Newton family reunions. Michelle was a member of the original reunion committee. Darrell's far-reaching assistance was critical to bringing many reunions to fruition. Following Uncle Lawrence's tradition of attending family gatherings, Michelle and Darrell are responsible for organizing their siblings, children, nieces, and nephews of this strain of the family not only to attend the celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual / Biennial N-P-S Family Reunion in Atlantic City, New Jersey, but also their efforts resulted in their strain of the family's attendance to all of the other family reunions. My uncle Lawrence Patrick's perspective could reveal another lens of our family through Michelle and Darrell, since Uncle Lawrence brings a male perspective to the Newton matriarchy (woman-centered families) and reveals his involvement in issues surrounding the Newton reunions that fostered the full support of his offspring.

Michelle Patrick was born August 10, 1959 and Darrell Patrick was born September 20, 1958 in Chicago, Illinois. Both of them migrated to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania during the early '70s where they continue to reside.

*Phyllis Smith.* My cousin Phyllis, the only child of my Auntie Ellen, attended every reunion except two (2006 and 2007), hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Newton-Patrick-Smith Family Reunion in 1998 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and was a principal member of the organizing committee that researched and visited various locations in the Wilkes-Barre and Pocono Mountain areas that were prospective sites for the first family reunion. Phyl, as one of the youngest in the *Offspring's* generation, can attest to the memories of our grandmother's house from a grandchild's perspective and the family traditions that resonated there because she lived with Grandma Emma.

Phyllis Lynn Smith was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on August 5, 1961 and currently resides there.

### *The Youngsters (7<sup>th</sup> Generation)*

*Ronald Nickens* (a.k.a. Ron). My son, Ronald Nickens' story (the first textual version), gives us a complete narrative of all of my ancestral grandmothers. Ron was born on December 3, 1969 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania and is the oldest of his generation, the *Youngsters*. *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book* details Ron's involvement in our family's storytelling. Many years later, I, as his mother, would use his narrative in the development of my dissertation. In Ron's story (see page 164), he details some of the reasons why our Grandmother Emma Newton chose to migrate to Pennsylvania and her fascination with William Penn. In the study, I discuss and speculate about Grandma

Emma's intrigue with the state of Pennsylvania. Ron's inquisitiveness at age 12 during the data collection phase of his paper was the backdrop of daily conversations, because he learned so much about the Newton family. Discussions about his great grandma Emma became a constant way for him to gain knowledge and process it. (Here, it is important to mention that the first family tree by a family member that we knew about was constructed through the information that Ron collected). Also, the value instilled via the research process itself because of its meaning-making resulted in Ron's questions such as "So, Virginia is my third cousin?" and his realization about the importance of understanding family relations.

Ronald Paul (Cross) Nickens was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on December 3, 1969 and migrated to Los Angeles, California (with his mother) at a mere 2 months old. Ron currently resides in Sacramento, California.

*Akiba Jama.* Akiba Jama is the middle child and second daughter of Constance French (a.k.a. Tiombe Jama) whom I fondly remembered as "Candy," her nickname, when I was a little girl. After reconnecting with the Newton family after a period of alienation, I became friends with Tiombe. As a result, I visited her on several occasions in Oakland, California and had an opportunity to become acquainted with my little (or second) cousins, her children, Faida, Akiba, and Khalfoni. This relationship to Constance's children extended when Akiba migrated to New York in 2002 and resided with my Uncle Lawrence Patrick, her grandfather. Akiba migrated to New York in search of our Aunt Marion Patrick and instead was reunited with her grandfather. Akiba represented her mother at the 2002 N-P-S Family Reunion in New York and also her

grandfather's funeral in 2005. Akiba's piece of prose in the "Youngsters: A Different Homeplace" section is the result of these familial ties that I analyzed in the study.

My Uncle Lawrence Russell Patrick (Grandma Emma's youngest twin) was born on July 6, 1928 and passed away on April 22, 2005. His daughter, Constance French, was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania on October 24, 1946. His grand daughter, Akiba Jama, was born in Oakland, California on November 13, 1973.

*Leonard Jerome Cross, Jr.* I [re]constructed and analyzed Lenny's testimonial as part of my study. The tape of my mother, Bernice Cross', 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party was lost. Therefore, one of my tasks included researching and corroborating Lenny's testimony at the party. I felt (as many other relatives attending the celebration) that his speech was empowering and could shed some light on the *Youngster's* perspective in the study.

Leonard, Jr.'s story is that he attended many family reunions as a young child because he lived with his grandmother Bernice. The memories he has about the reunions are poignant, particularly since his experiences include the genesis of reunions in the Newton family: the first two in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania when he accompanied his grandmother.

Lenny was born July 29, 1980 in Anaheim, California.

*Telisa and Carlos King.* Telisa and Carlos King, II, children of Valerie [Cross] King were born on September 8, 1988 and June 2, 1991. Although I am very close to all of my nieces and nephews, I have spent a great deal of quality time with Telisa and Carlos (my youngest niece and nephew). Telisa and Carlos spent much of their time visiting me on college campuses. Since Telisa and Carlos had become a part of my life, it seems as if much of my time had been spent in pursuit of college degrees. One



explanation for our close relationship is the fact that I am their Godmother. Both Telisa and Carlos have attended most of our family reunions. Telisa is a principle participant in the study, while Carlos in his own unique way functioned as a potential organizer and proponent of the family reunion event within his strain of the family. As data in the study, I used an email that Carlos sent to his grandmother (Bernice's) strain of the family to attend a minifamily reunion that he proposed to be held in Las Vegas annually.

I analyzed Telisa's interviews and Carlos' email incorporating this data into the findings of the study.

Telisa King resides in San Francisco, California where she is in her junior year of college. She was born September 8, 1988. Carlos King, II born June 2, 1991 currently resides in Tulsa, Oklahoma with his wife and son.

*Patrick Charles Lamoreaux.* Patrick is the son of Darrell Patrick. He has attended some of the East coast reunions, and currently is a participant in the study.

Patrick's voice was instrumental in the decision-making process of the family meeting at the 2010 Newton Family Reunion in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Patrick expressed concerns about the family taking on more responsibilities than it could handle for the prospective 2011 family reunion. He recommended "crawling before we walk" in planning and developing future family reunions. Patrick felt strongly about the ideal and importance of having as many family reunions in Wilkes-Barre as possible, since the majority of the Newton family resides there. I used his interviews to interrogate the idea of "grandmother" and "grandfather."

Patrick resides in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, but was born in Larksville, Pennsylvania on February 23, 1988.

*Jonathan Smith.* Jonathan was in the fourth grade at Robert Morris Elementary School in Scranton, Pennsylvania, when his teacher, Mrs. Douaihy, assigned the “Personal Narrative” project to his English class. I will analyze Jonathan’s personal narrative and include the findings in my dissertation.

Jonathan was born on February 14, 1995 and resides in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

*Kendall Davis.* Kendall Davis, the oldest child of Robin Smith (Proctor) was born on June 29, 1995 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Kendall, like his cousin Jonathan, has been attending family reunions since age 2. I interviewed Kendall to find out his viewpoint about family relationships, particularly the Newton family reunions. I utilized this information as part of the findings’ section of my dissertation.

Thus, the boundless generations of aforementioned family members have been part of the ongoing stories in the Newton family. Their participation in the study corroborates the many stories about my grandmothers that I remember. The study, then, augments research about the process of intergenerational knowledge transmission for Black families. According to Sleeter (2007), we should:

...explore use of family history narratives as a tool for disrupting racism and deepening cultural understanding. Family histories delve into historical and cultural complexities in a way that texts about history generally not do, and can uncover lost stories of resistance to oppression, confronting racism, working for justice, or claiming non-Anglo identities. For Whites, these lost narratives can be particularly surprising and awakening. For people of color, they can be historically empowering. (NCORE Conference, 2007)

Thus, through the storytelling efforts of the participants, the function of this research study interrogates [re]constituting and/or [re]constructing family narratives and revealing the knowledge production process embedded within family traditions such as orality that I argue ultimately manifests itself at the site of the Black family reunion.

### *Data Sources and Collection*

Five sources of data will be used for the case study: (1) oral stories (and written texts derived from them); (2) life notes such as personal narratives, correspondence (including emails) constructed by various family members, photographs, and artifacts; (3) interviews and focus groups; (4) researcher reflective narrative of the family reunions; and (5) Blogs of the *Youngsters*' generation to connect their meanings of family stories and knowledge about previous generations.

*Oral stories.* The “field” component of this study resulted from my son Ron’s seventh grade Family Tree Project in 1983. The project was an assignment from Ron’s junior high school history teacher, and it aroused the interest of family members to recapture or reconstruct family stories. Ultimately, the project became the underlying reason for the notion of a Newton family reunion. There was lots of scurrying around within the family when Ron came home one day and announced he had to research and submit a term paper on the family’s history and therefore, needed biographical and historical information. I immediately contacted my Mother and Aunt Marion, along with their first cousins Virginia Newton (Roberts), Viola Jackson, and Little cousin Newton (Taylor) to obtain this information. My grandmother Emma Newton (Patrick-Smith-Choice), “the holder of the stories,” died 2 years earlier. Therefore, we had to move quickly to [re]construct the stories (without Grandma) in order for Ron to submit his paper on time. Could we gather all of the information/stories that would result in a viable paper for Ron’s project? Everyone cooperated – my mother, aunts, and cousins. My theory about the families’ “cooperative” efforts (exhibited by my son’s generation – the *Youngsters*, my generation – the *Offspring*, and my mother’s generation – the *Elders*) is

they believed in the importance of the stories, since my grandmother, Lou Emma and her *Ancestors* (the deceased) repeatedly told them. With Grandma Emma's death came the family's [unconscious] position that the stories were and still remain important and must be collected and [re]told not only to keep the spirit and the essence of the Newton family alive; but also, to continue the tradition of passing down the stories to future generations. The stories of my ancestors were collected through at least one or more interviews with members of the *Elders* generation over a decade from 1984 through 1997. Thus, the family case of interest in gathering as a family grew into a large data base that is the foundation of the case study, an event of the Black family reunion.

"The family reunion is an *event type* with a specific form and pattern," Neville (1984) states (p. 156). The initial Newton family interviews led to the formation of reunions in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in 1997 and 1998, in Baltimore, Maryland in 2000, New York City, New York in 2002, Long Beach, California in 2004, Salt Lake City, Utah in 2006, Atlantic City, New Jersey in 2007, Las Vegas, Nevada in 2008 and again in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in 2010 – a total of nine reunions over a little more than the past decade. Since the majority of the Newton descendants live in Pennsylvania, reunions tend to be larger when held there: 115 and 103 respectively in 1997 and 1998 and 76 in 2010. The Baltimore and New York reunions had 50 plus in attendance, which dropped down to 15 to 30 for the remainder. Seemingly, the greater the distance from the "home ground" (Gundaker, 1998), the less family members had the ability to attend.

*Life notes.* "Life notes refer broadly to constructed personal narratives such as letters, stories, journal entries, reflections, poetry, music, and other artful forms" (Bell-Scott, 1994, p. 13). They are "a form of narrative" that can be seen as the embodiment of

meaning and reflections “that consciously attend to a whole life as it is embedded in sociocultural contexts and communities of affinity.” As a lens, life notes allow me to include the voices from the *Offspring* generation and perhaps compare or contrast the oral stories of the *Ancestor* generation to the written texts about family/reunions they provide such as my cousin Akiba’s poem to me entitled, “Cousin P;” my nephew Carlos’ email to the West coast strain of the family suggesting “a new tradition” – an invitation inviting his “immediate family” to a “mini-family reunion...in Las Vegas, Nevada;” my cousin Jonathan’s “Personal [Reunion] Narrative” that was a fourth grade school project, and my son Ron’s “Family Tree Project” also a seventh grade school assignment. Criswell (2000, 2004) found “commonalities and patterns among students’ descriptions” of their family reunions, “particularly African American[s]” (p.1). I believe this lens will enable me to answer the research question about the purpose of family reunions and get at underlying values, belief systems, and traditions of family rituals.

*Interviews and focus groups.* Collection of the Newton family oral stories spanned over a 14-year period from 1983 through 1997, the year of the first reunion and again in 2010. I consider the family interviews as my induction into “the field” component of the research. The process required interviewing the *Elders* generation, which consisted of 9 participants: my mother and 5 of her siblings and 3 of her first cousins to triangulate and corroborate the stories. Polkinghorne (1995) contends purposive selection of data sources includes the selection of people or documents of the experience that the researcher is investigating. He defines purposive selection as deliberately or purposefully sought out, not random. I conducted a total of 11 in-depth interviews/focus groups and

focused visits that ranged between 1 to 3 occasions and was a participant observer at all of the family reunions.

*Blogs.* During the Winter of 2009, I launched a Blog on the Newton family's website, *MySpace*, and *Facebook* on the Internet as a method to triangulate the study's process. Most importantly, not only did these spaces give voice to the *Youngsters'* generation, but they provided an opportunity for them to participate in the inquiry. Blogs are "self-expressions" and serve as discussion commentaries online about a particular topic of interest (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>). In this case, I used Blogs as part of the data-collection base of additional information about the Newton family reunions that are open-ended. I believe the information retrieved from the Blogs is part of the family's cultural perspective and should be a forum where everyone reaches a comfort zone to utilize and share their thoughts with other family members.

In the data collection phase of the study, I used Bell-Scott's *Life Notes* (1994), Lanehart's *Sista Speak* (2001), and Etter-Lewis's *My Soul is My Own* (1993) as models for this research that told the stories of 7 generations of the Newton family. As mentioned above, I used oral stories and written texts derived from them, personal narratives, and Blogs to search for the theme of racial socialization and how those lessons play out in an inter-generational study of the Newton family. According to Ely, Anzul, et al. (1991) developing themes or categories can help the researcher tease out the meaning of the finding and then determine how categories may be linked. Also, they argue that a theme can be defined as a statement of meaning that runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or in the case of minorities, carries heavy emotional or factual impact. Importantly,

themes are thought of as the researcher-inferred statement that highlights explicit or implied attitudes toward life.

To better facilitate the study, I teased out these themes. I used questions through Blogs and interviews. Life history interviews were used, through the use of open-ended questions, to elicit structured autobiographies or detailed studies of the lives of individuals. The goal of this approach is to have the participants recount their experience within the topic of study. This was accomplished through one interview and three separate Blogs to the *Youngster's* generation. Interviewing and blogging will allow the informants to draw on significant experiences. This method provided a way for family members to reflect about “life lessons” that can serve as social/cultural practices, for example, both at family reunions as well as around the dinner table. Interviews may be the dominant strategy for data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In order to find the answers to my research questions I used interviews and Blogs to gather the descriptive data in the participants own words in order to develop insights into the participants’ interpretations. The two types of interviewing techniques that I used to develop insights into my participants piece of the world were unstructured and semi-structured interviews. According to Benard (1988), unstructured and semi structured interviews are the most widely used methods of data collection.

We interview people informally during the course of an ordinary day. We interview people about any and everything that goes on in their lives. He makes an argument that an unstructured interview is based on a clear plan that is characterized by a minimum control over the participant’s responses.

The point is to get the participants to “open up” and express themselves on their own terms and at their own pace. For the purposes of this study, this informal type of interviewing allows the participants, even though the participants in this study are my

family members, to build an initial rapport. Although I am their relative (e.g., daughter, granddaughter, mother, auntie, and cousin), I am still conducting research that has some ground rules to be followed (Benard, 1988; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Ely, Anzul, et. al, 1991). Thus, this was the type of interviewing I used as the initial data collection method, as I looked for themes that relate to racial socialization.

I set up initial interview questions that I used as a foundation for the interview questions. Spradley (1979) identifies three types of questions for this purpose: (1) descriptive questions enable a person to collect an ongoing sample of an informant's language, (2) structural questions enable the ethnographer to discover information about the informant's cultural knowledge and to allow the ethnographer to find out how the informant organized their knowledge, and (3) contrast questions allow the ethnographer to discover the dimensions the informants employ to distinguish the objects and events in their world. I will use the following initial set of research questions for this study.

### *Adult Protocol*

1. I am interested in how our family passes on its family stories. Can you tell me a story you remember hearing about our family?
  - a. Yes, I remember that one, too. Can you remember when you heard that story? Who told it to you? Do you know where they heard it?
  - b. Did this story leave you with a lesson? Or, do you remember any other stories that had a lesson?
2. What traditions or values have been passed down to you in stories from the family?



3. I know that you that you attended Newton-Patrick-Smith family reunions in 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2010. Tell me about the stories you heard at these reunions?
4. What purposes do you think our family reunions serve in our family?
5. Why do you come to our family reunions?

I developed a junior protocol that takes into consideration the younger, elementary-aged relatives to ensure their comprehension of the questions and to better guide/control the interview process. The following questions were for family members 12 years old and under.

#### *Junior Protocol*

1. How have you heard any stories about your grandmothers?
2. What is one of the most memorable stories you have heard?
  - a. Did you learn anything from that story?
  - b. Why is it so memorable?
3. Did you learn anything from the stories? If so, what did you learn?
4. Why do you attend family reunions? How many have you attended?
5. What do you take away from family reunions?

These questions were used as initial questions to start my participants and myself thinking about how racial socialization has impacted generations of families. After an analysis of this set of data, I compared the data to past generations of the Newton family to look specifically at social/cultural practices. In order to help develop validity within the research, I compared and contrasted the themes across generations. This is important

to see if their accounts are similar or different. This also helps support my thesis around racial socialization in terms of how family experiences impact what they did in their homes and community, which in turn has an effect on what I do in mine. This is what Milner (2003) terms cultural comprehensive knowledge. He defines this as an accumulation of the multiple experiences that shaped how a teacher understands the world. He argues that teachers shape their pedagogy through personal and professional experiences.

### *Data Management*

I used one paid transcriptionist to transcribe much of the interviews, an IPOD or portable media player with a hard drive that connects to an electronic voice recorder to create electronic interview data. The information was downloaded from the IPOD onto my personal computer's hard drive. Following transcription, I listened to each interview while personally examining the transcript for accuracy and as an initial step of immersing myself in the data.

In combination with the IPOD, I used EndNote, a bibliographic reference program and online search tool to access databases and retrieve references from documents directly related to my dissertation. Important features of this particular software are: organization of charts, tables, figures and equations; formatting bibliographies, citations, and figures on manuscripts, etc. ([www.endnote.com](http://www.endnote.com)).

### *Data Analysis*

To ascertain the practice or process of knowledge production, or the construction and [re]construction of knowledge, is to understand the standpoint theory of Black feminists and womanists whose stories are based on their criterion of meaning. For example, an overarching theme of orality is the storyteller and the stories derived from their lived experiences at all levels, past and present. According to Collins (2000), Black women's standpoint uses experience as a criterion of meaning. As I analyzed the stories of my family, I realized that their stories were based on lived experiences. Experience is a fundamental epistemological tenet of Black feminist thought. Many of the stories that my maternal grandmothers told were experiential in nature and had a familiarity of pervasive themes in each of the narratives. As such, the oral stories become a unit of analysis because of the significance attached to the stories; not only from an individual perspective (as noted with the *life notes* of the *Youngsters'* generation), but also collectively as exhibited through the stories of my grandmother.

I analyzed those oral stories through the contextualization of written stories (i.e., life notes, photographs, and artifacts), transcriptions from interviews/reflexive journals/field notes, grouping together similar themes. Through this process, I intend to focus on a few major themes by doing a close, critical reading of the themes, utilizing the content of those data. A critical reading would add dimension and texture to the content of the analysis, and thus add a layer of complexity to the data. As I engage in this process, I will constantly revisit sections of the data to analyze and further challenge my interpretations. The end result of a close reading will be the addition of other themes that surface from the data. These procedures, in part, corroborate with Polkinghorne's (2005)

discussion about the qualitative research process as an “iterative one, moving from collection of data to analysis and back until the description is comprehensive” (p. 140). Included in the analysis was a heavy reliance on my interviews, field, and/or self-reflexive notes detailing any issues revealed in the stories that the storytellers themselves have divulged. My interpretation of these data sources was a critical component of my role as researcher, involved the creation of sketches about the storytellers’ lives, and further contributed to our understandings about orality, including the many themes that surfaced in *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book (1997)*. I constantly revisited sections of the stories, field and/or self-reflexive journal notes and the family book in an effort to ensure interpretations are representative of the storytellers, themselves.

## CHAPTER 5

### HOMEPLACE: SAFE SPACES IN UNSAFE TIMES

...In these stories about the family, the house is central to the relationships that existed among the family members. The house, as home, shows how it is a link between family members from generation-to-generation, and provides a glimpse into the past as it frames the present from an historical context.

– WARSAW, 1997, pp. 6-7

Chapter 5 introduced bell hooks' (1990) notion of *homeplace* as seen within the context of many African American families. The chapter connected *homeplace* to the idea of *grandma's house* as a space where knowledge production, specifically racial resilience and Black racial socialization practices occurred and is internalized within Black families. The section not only provided a thorough analysis about the notion of homeplace, but also highlighted the stories transmitted in the Newton family that spoke about the importance of homeplaces. The themes that resonated from the data were stories and storytelling, grandma's house, and houses that embody the rituals happening in those homes. hooks informed us that *homeplace* is identified as a safe space where values and beliefs are embedded in the stories that are told intergenerationally. Stories such as hooks' rendition of her grandmother's house functioned informally in the homeplaces and have been internalized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century at particular sites that I argued are the sites of African American family reunions. The chapter teased out the notion of

the Black family as an institution where children are educated informally at home about racial socialization.

### *The Homeplace*

Throughout various periods in North America, the Black family remained resilient and thus persevered (Logan, 2001). The institution of slavery physically disrupted Black families. As an institution, slavery worked against Black families: marriage was forbidden, formal education was illegal, Jim Crow or legal segregation laws prevailed, and equity for Blacks was unattainable in a White supremacist society. Nevertheless, the notion of family remained intact as a value that espoused home and family, strong kinship systems, and diversified family forms. For instance, United States history textbooks excluded facts about the post-slavery, reconstruction era when emancipated Blacks sought to reunify and reconstitute their families. Cultural critic and [Black] feminist scholar bell hooks' (1990) narrative is reminiscent of reunification and illustrates the power of family. hooks' theorization about the "homeplace" in Chapter 2 sheds light about our understanding of our grandmothers houses.

My research findings revealed that all of the participants across generations reminisced about their grandmothers' houses much like hooks. *Homeplace* provided a lens that facilitated comprehension about meaning-making within contemporary Black family narratives that connected the idea of reunification or family members gathering at particular sites such as Black family reunions. In the study, I argued to reinstate the utilization of *homeplace* as a contemporary practice through bell hooks' (1990) articulation and applying the theory to our own families. I provided an example of this

that models hooks, here, in a similar fashion. I described my grandma's house in a poem entitled, *Another Homestead*:

My Grandma's House . . . a stately Victorian structure  
three stories tall at 189 South State Street

With a wide verandah halfway 'round  
the house, a porch swing in the front  
and a glider on the side leading  
to a door to Grandpa's room.

My Grandma's House . . . a motley gray structure  
looming over neighborhood homes  
was distinct in many ways  
and certainly  
a far cry from the  
*two-room shack of the other*  
*Grandmothers' houses*  
The homesteads  
in the country ----WARSAW

– WARSAW, 1997, p. 49

From the aforementioned passage is gleaned my family's socioeconomic status. I grew up in a lower working class, poor community in a predominantly White region of northeastern Pennsylvania. The passage connects class status to pride in land ownership which "lifts up" the family. As discussed earlier in the *Methods Section*, my grandmother Emma "hit the numbers" and bought the big Victorian house described above.

Here in another sampling of descriptions representing the *Ancestors, Elders, Offspring and Youngsters* generations are provided glimpses of several grandmothers' houses through the generations where a broad scope of themes surfaced, from food<sup>21</sup> as

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion about foods in African American culture see Professor Frederick Douglass Opie author of *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America* (2008) who discusses the geography and history of Black cooking. Opie compares the foodways of people of African descent throughout the Americas while he deconstructs and

an African survival, to the love relationships existing within the parameters of these houses. Many of the participants spoke about the cuisine and foodstuffs fed to them at their grandmothers' houses, and many of the participants reminisced about their positive experiences. Through the words of Bernice, Viola, Paulette, Telisa, Lenny, Jr. and Ron, we feel how they experienced not only the positive relational connections of family dinners but also the meanings these participants associated to those spaces.

### *Cooking as Tradition*

*Bernice and Viola – Elders' generation.* Meal times and the food preparation at each of the ancestral grandma's houses were popular themes among the participants. I learned much from my mother, Bernice's stories about grandma Emma's specialty, wholecake bread. Mom (Bernice) said:

Mama made her wholecake [bread] out of White cornmeal instead of flour. She always ate fish and greens with it. She had a special brand of cornmeal that she ordered all the way from Virginia. It was stone ground. Mama made her own wholecake [bread] up until the day she died.

– WARSAW, 1996, p. 26

I share this story because it is tied to the family rituals that occurred in my Grandma Emma's house. Rituals (Crichton 1998; Dillworth-Williams 2002; Miller-Cribbs 2004; Neville 1984; Waniek 1989) demonstrate the importance of Black racial socialization practices, such as the way in which African Americans prepare their food. For instance, in most African American homes, one finds a Black cast iron skillet. What is learned when using these pans is the tradition of wiping it down and oiling them after cooking

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interprets the health legacies of Black culinary traditions, and explains the concept of soul itself, revealing soul food to be an amalgamation of West and Central African social and cultural influences as well as the adaptations Blacks made to the conditions of slavery and freedom in the Americas.



daily meals such as cornbread or “crackling” bread. Cornbread, “crackling” and whole cake breads are part of poor Black folk’s tradition of “making do” – i.e., it is the notion of utilizing anything: scraps, pieces or staples to make a meal and produce clothing. It is learning to survive on nothing, as the slaves did and passed down. The tradition of “making do” naturally connects to Celie’s ideal in *The Color Purple* of making quilts from scraps. What resonates in many Black families is how learning through stories becomes tradition. Another example of these practices are seen in the recipes of our ancestral grandmothers became tradition as the *Offspring* generation learns to prepare them as instructed by their *Elders*. This act, of passing down information, contributes to the posterity of African American families and epitomizes the knowledge production process.

*Paulette – Offspring’s generation.* Cornbread<sup>22</sup> and wholecake bread were staples at Grandma Emma’s house. Whenever we visited her house, there was always one or the other on the stove in her favorite Black iron frying pan. As a child experiencing the traditions, I never understood that wholecake bread was a tradition passed down in the family until much later in life when I was an adult. The findings of my study corroborated this fact not only through my mother’s testimony above but also through my cousin Viola’s storytelling where she remembered that all of our ancestral grandmothers “[c]ooked bread on top of the stove” (WARSAW, 1997, p. 27). The idea that bread was cooked on top of the stove triggered memories about stories that my mother told me about making bread. As I recalled:

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<sup>22</sup> Grandma Emma’s cornbread looked like pancakes, except that the batter was a mixture of corn meal and a little flour. Mom’s wholecake bread was completely made out of flour (looking like biscuit dough). Both versions of bread were fried in a frying pan on top of the stove.

Mom and Grandma cooked bread on top of the stove. When we were little kids and were very poor Mom cooked ‘wholecake bread’ on top of the stove in a Black iron frying pan. We loved it when she served it with homemade applesauce or apple butter or fried apples. But when Mom started working for the government and her financial situation got much better, she stopped making wholecake [bread]. (WARSAW, 1997, p. 26)

The themes of food and tradition are revealed as Viola shares the story of our ancestral grandmothers survival skills such as “cooking on top” of the stove. Our grandmothers did not have ovens in their country houses. In Viola’s rendition of this story, she credits her grandmothers for their sense of pride and resiliency as positive roles models. The idea of socio-economic status versus family heritage surfaced in Viola and Bernice’s stories and transmitted messages about survival to me.

*Telisa – Youngsters’ generation.* In a personal interview I conducted with Telisa on September 8, 2010, she revealed the lessons she learned at her grandma Bernice’s house and expressed her appreciation for the kind of home she created.

Because of my Grandmother, all of the jazz greats such as Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald are not names one blurts out during trivial pursuit. These musicians mean something to me, as they should: the 1930’s, (*Telisa laughs*) meatloaf, Russian dish and a host of stories are the product of my Grandmother and the home she has created for all of her children!

– *Personal Interview,*  
September 8, 2010, p.1

Telisa’s narrative demonstrated several characteristics of her grandmother Bernice as the strong Black grandmother who impacted her life. Telisa credited her Grandmother Bernice for the contributions she passed down to her about African American historical knowledge, the Black legacy, and family traditions that attributed to her (Telisa’s) strong sense of pride and resiliency, because she was a positive role model.

*Lenny, Jr. – Youngsters’ generation:*

My grandma's [Bernice's] house is a special place for many reasons. One [reason] in particular is because at one time or another all of her grandchildren lived with her. What was great during those times is that we enjoyed her cooking. My favorite dish of grandma's is her greens. Nobody makes greens like grandma! And, you can visit [her house] almost anytime and she'll go to the fridge and pull them out. I tried making them many times, and called her to get the recipe, but my greens never turn out like grandma's (smiling).

– *Testimony/Bernice Cross' Birthday Celebration, February, 2004*

Lenny associates the pride he feels toward his Grandma Bernice because she holds a prominent place in his heart, since at one time or another his survival depended on Grandma Bernice. In the aforementioned passage, themes of *othermothering*, caring, survival and learning life's lessons are key points. Because Lenny was informed by his grandmother, he learned to negotiate his life principally utilizing faith-based systems, family, education and independence – all modeled daily by her.

*Ron – Youngsters' generation.* Below, Ron's verse of a piece of poetry written in honor of his grandmother's house presents a question about the dinner meal where he hints about a favorite dish she has prepared:

Is that my favorite dish?

Dinner.

I am delighted.

As with all of the participants, Ron's small excerpt highlights the sense of pride he experiences at his Grandmother Bernice's house when she cooks for him.

In addition to the house as a structure or "safespace," at many African American homeplaces, one is likely to find the staples of soul food (elements of southern cooking characteristically different because of the way in which Black folk prepared it, making it their own): cornbread, collard greens, and fried chicken as the data revealed. Additional themes included class and land ownership, pride and resiliency, self-determination,

positive relationships and role models, the idea of “making do”, and a strong Black grandmother as central to the homeplace and survival. The next section, *Grandma’s House: Learning Outside of School*, centers the knowledge production process occurring in African American families that is in part an epistemological and pedagogical component of Black families.

### *Grandma’s House: Learning Outside of School*

In the following section, I described the experiences the family encountered at my grandma Emma’s house based on my experiences. The prose below speaks to some of the memories occurring at 198 South State Street, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania and the recollections of many relatives are seen through one voice, “the family.”

The population of Wilkes-Barre in 1964 when I migrated to Los Angeles, California was approximately 75,000 people of which comprised 500 African American families. Most of the Blacks in the city were lower-working class and poor people. The African American community there was closely-knitted together to fortify its strength and resiliency in order to counter White supremacy. As with any small, close community, African Americans worshipped together in two Black churches, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church and Mt. Zion Baptist Church. The politics intra-racially in the city were congruent to the times; such as, for African Americans, the paper bag test was the standard in Black communities. Black folk were aligned along phenotype; therefore, lines were drawn along skin color that spoke to who attended what church, club or organization in which one could belong. For example, if you were a “light skinned” person, you were privileged to attend the A.M.E. Church, invited to join

the 402 Club or Eastern Stars or any elite organization. If you were “dark-skinned,” however, you attended the Baptist church and were not privy to Black society. Another example that struck me as an adult was the fact that most African Americans in the city lived on two streets, Lincoln and Wells, and everyone attended the Colored Y (i.e., Young Men’s Christian Association). This struck me as odd since I lived in northeastern Pennsylvania where supposedly integration was the standard at the time. The information is critical in understanding the dynamics about the city of Wilkes-Barre, the region where my family resided. Grandma Emma, as some of the ancestors before her had an entrepreneurial nature; she was resilient and a survivor demonstrated by the way in which she managed her house (which was central to the Black community). Emma was a numbers’ taker and she ran a rooming house, everyone knew “Miss Patrick” (Lou Emma Newton-Patrick-Smith-Choice) and visited her house at one time or another between “playing the numbers, renting rooms, obtaining a “free” meal, and patronizing Grandpa Slim’s (William Choice’s) underground barbershop for a haircut. Grandma always had people at her house.

Thus, the recollections of my grandma’s (Emma’s) house that preface the beginning of Chapter 6 and recorded in its entirety below is where I learned about family relationships, role models, Black history, faith and spirituality, and many more of life’s lessons. The story of my grandma’s house below is reminiscent of hooks’ (1990) rendition:

*From my earliest years...  
I remember the wonderful times we had  
at my Grandma’s House...*

*The family relationships and interactions at my  
Grandma’s House were central to the  
traditions of our family.*

*Our ancestors -- our OTHER Grandmothers,  
 all of their offspring: children  
 and grandchildren  
 and also their friends  
 and friends of friends  
 enjoyed many happy days  
 at my Grandma's House 'til the day  
 she died in 1981.*

*Later, when Peaches and I as young adults left our home  
 for California,  
 we trekked across country  
 many times over the years  
 to spend Christmases with our family:  
 our Mother and Father,  
 sisters and brothers  
 and especially with  
 our Grandma.*

*At Grandma's House  
 visiting great aunts and uncles,  
 my cousins  
 Billy and Lionel, Larry,  
 McKinley and Gregory  
 was very special to me.  
 And there were my special friends, too,  
 who visited my Grandma's house  
 like Paulette and Frieda,  
 Helena, Patsy and Joanne,  
 and Ickey and Alice.*

*Everything climaxed at Grandma's House.  
 I remember as a child that  
 the day just didn't seem right  
 if we did not visit her.  
 Many Sundays, after church,  
 we went over to Grandma's.  
 On the way over, we always  
 stopped by Auntie Lorraine's.  
 All of our holidays were spent at my Grandma's.  
 Pleasant memories of Aunty Ellen cooking  
 in Grandma's kitchen  
 come to mind.  
 I can see her smiling  
 and tasting the food.  
 Aunty Ellen could really cook  
 (and by the smile on her face  
 she really enjoyed her own cooking).  
 Mom, Aunty Lorraine, and Aunt Marion*

*always pitched in, but it was  
Aunty Ellen who was  
the 'cook' in Grandma's kitchen.*

*It was at those formal and informal occasions  
and just about whenever we visited Grandma  
that she  
would tell us stories.*

*She was an avid reader,  
and even though she was not educated  
beyond sixth grade,  
to us kids she knew everything.*

*Grandma read papers  
from around the country – she was  
an 'authority' on all current events  
and the Bible.*

*We Grandchildren respected  
everything our Grandmother had to say.*

*We all would sit in her living room  
around her chair, and listen to the  
many tales she had to tell:*

*stories about our 'other' grandmothers and  
slavery, racism and civil rights,  
and stories about the occult  
(she even pulled out an article  
dating back to 1930s about the  
Amityville horror and showed it to us).*

*Grandma talked about mysterious murders, too,  
she could discuss and debate  
any subject that anyone brought  
up. But to me*

*the most interesting stories  
were those told about our ancestors ---  
our other Grandmothers:  
Ellen, Isabelle, and Mary Ellen  
(her mother).*

*—WARSAW, 1997, p. 20*

In the first stanza, remembrance is the overarching theme that surfaces and how the centrality of grandma's house functioned to connect family members to their traditions. The passage wreaks of nostalgia seen in the discussion in Chapter 6 when my cousin Phyl and I read this passage at the first formal family reunion in 1997. It touched everyone present, because of its nostalgic essence and it was relatable, just as hooks'

rendition of her grandma's house.

The second stanza demonstrates the idea of personal responsibility and accountability in the way my sister and I felt the necessity to travel to the East to spend holidays with the family. At the time, as teenagers, we had no idea that we had internalized family traditions, we just acted spontaneously to something that we had done all of our lives. The internalization of ritual and tradition are the overarching themes in the passage and speaks to the ethics of caring (Collins, 2000). The passage demonstrates how internalization about the idea of ritual functions positively in family relationships reifying its ideals and beliefs.

The third stanza provides a pedagogical perspective and demonstrates the teaching and learning happening at grandma's house. There, we learned about particular relatives (genealogy) – i.e., the idea of particularity and who is related to whom and what that relationship is/means and how it is defined. Family relations are central to this passage, along with friends (extended family) coupled with subtle intonations about community sharing. As a little girl, my closest friends lived in my grandma's neighborhood. They visited her house regularly and interacted with all of my relatives, whom also visited there daily. Ritual, again, is the central theme here. The idea of *Sunday dinners*, family, food, and shared responsibility surfaces as we see images of Auntie Ellen assisting her mother (Emma) with cooking dinner. The value of family highlights this verse.

The fifth and final stanza exhibits homplace as the site/space where knowledge is gained. My grandmother's house was the location where we heard stories of slavery, Jim Crow, Civil Rights and how to navigate in a racist society. In this verse we witness the



complexity of the intergenerational impact Grandma had on our informal education intersectioned with Black racial socialization. For example, Grandma read aloud to us from various Black newspapers from across the country to keep apprised of happenings in the African American community. This passage reflects the idea of intergenerational knowledge, and the idea of how the family/Black grandmother participates in the transmission of family stories. These are central themes in the passage, including African American history with underlying themes of racism.

In a discussion about the meaning and importance associated to *Elders* as one of the functions of the “homeplace” seen in many African American families, both Telisa and Ron (first cousins) had this to say about their Grandma (Bernice):

In the Black family *elder* means a lot. I do not know if that’s true for every family but I think that since my grandmother is the oldest sibling and now she is an *Elder* in her generation that has something to do with the reason why everyone gives her that recognition. I am sure that when she was my age she wasn’t like the “Bernice Cross” she is now. Like, I am sure. She probably was just one of the cousins and you know I mean you’re significant but you’re not like you are now.

Telisa, Focus Group  
September 7, 2010, p 5

Telisa shares the pride and respect she feels for her grandma (Bernice) not only as her grandmother but also as an Elder in the Newton family. Telisa understands that her grandmother is an Elder – a role that has evolved from child or cousin and now has come full circle through the evolution of time. Nevertheless, a special endearment surfaces about the notion of “Elder” in Telisa’s mind. Underlying her point-of-view is the subtle suggestion defining an Elder as a person who deserves respect and honor. Within this definition, Telisa believes her grandmother, as an Elder, epitomizes the ideal of what it

means to be one. In some ways, Telisa's narrative compares and contrasts her cousin, Ron's perspective:

I do not know ... because while grandma doesn't surround herself with people on the outside; however, that's all she does is surround herself with family whether or not they are good or bad, she is there to support them and she is definitely approachable to every family member. I think that this is true especially because she's an Elder too...so I do not know...but, whether or not she is in contact with her own generations or generations after, well I just think whether or not it is just "Bernice Cross," "Aunt Bea" or whatever, a lot of people know her and respect her...I do not know why either...

Ron, Focus Group  
September 7, 2010, p 5

Ron, regardless of his inability to comprehend some of the family dynamics, nevertheless, possesses a respectful outlook on the experiences he has encountered at his grandma's (Bernice's) house and her individuality; particularly, in terms of her leadership role as an Elder in the family, and the meanings associated to it. Because of the negatives that surface in family relationships, Ron's narrative suggests his inability to understand why his grandmother remains steady in her role as an Elder. He grapples with the idea that one should espouse this behavior if another is disrespectful towards you. Ron seemingly puts aside many of the faith-based lessons he learned about family, and supporting them in hard times (Crichton, 1998) in preference to the reality particular family members demonstrate.

*Lena – Elders' generation.* Although Lena is the youngest member of the *Elders'* generation, she was only 11 years older than me. Lena was the youngest of five children and the only girl; therefore, she viewed my mother as an older sister. The following obituary highlights Lena's life long achievements that she attributed to her cousin Bernice:

She graduated from Coughlin High School and Luzerne County Community College. Sister Taylor was employed as a social services coordinator by Luzerne County Head Start Program for more than 32 years and she previously was employed by local garment industries...Sister Taylor was a member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Wilkes-Barre, and its Usher Board, Hospitality Ministry, Missionary Society and Youth Celebration Committee; N.A.A.C.P.; Negro Women's Community League, Wilkes-Barre; Order of Eastern Star; board member, Neighborhood Resource Center, Developing Communities for Success, Planned Parenthood Association, and Victim Resources Center, Wilkes-Barre; involved in local councils, Boy Scouts of America, serving as first Lady Cub Master, Pack 99, Wright Elementary School, and Den Mother, board member, Penn Woods Council, Girl Scouts of America, Wilkes-Barre; headed local campaign, presidential election of Rev. Jesse Jackson, 1988; named Woman of Year by Luzerne County Commission for Women, 1994. She and her Husband, Reginald, served as foster parents of more than 14 children during the last 10 years.

– *Obituary, Denison Cemetery, Swoyersville PA, 1997*

Inspired by her older first cousin Bernice, Lena (Newton) Taylor<sup>23</sup> exemplified the latter part of her adult life as a community activist, because as Lena told me, she was inspired by my mother. Lena migrated from Warsaw, Virginia and lived with her aunt (Emma) with her baby son, Carl. There, at her aunt's house she interacted with relatives; particularly, her cousin Bernice. Lena learned by example what it meant to be family and how to become a good citizen. The central themes of the above excerpt from Lena's obituary are: the role of the Elders<sup>24</sup> and "auntie," othermother, family relationships, and community activism (Black women as agents of change).

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<sup>23</sup> Lena's reputation was that she was a "self-made woman" – meaning she hailed from difficult circumstances in her lifetime and rose to become a renowned figure in Wilkes-Barre's Black society.

<sup>24</sup> Within an historical context, Litwack (1998) assists our understanding in making the connections between the role of *Elders* in Black families. According to Litwack, grandparents (and parents) are essential to impart lessons about "morality, accommodation, and survival" while they simultaneously transmit culture and heritage, "For scores of young blacks, their *Elders* became revealed texts, conveying through story and song a history of practical value" (p. 43).

The contributions of Akiba, Jonathan, and Patrick in the below section entitled, *Youngsters: A Different Homeplace* provided a glimpse of what happened in the homeplace and centered the notions of [re]unification and connectivity – Sunday dinners, family relations, community, ritual, food and shared responsibilities, Black history and/or heritage, racism, slavery and Jim Crow, genealogy, role of the “*Elders*” (grandmother or grandfather and/or “auntie”), respect, family dynamics/politics, leadership, and positive experiences in “homeplaces.”

*Ancestors: Homeplace is the Homestead*

As the toilers laid their tools down for an endless rest. It’s on this site that my soul breathes to harvest my best. For what was planted by those before me will forever stand. On this rural countryside called Panola, my kinfolks’ land (Panola, Dilworth-Williams’, 2002).

After the Newton families second annual family reunion in 1998, my cousin Phyllis and I visited Warsaw, Virginia where the homestead and the gravesites of family members are buried on the church grounds of Clarksville Baptist Church. My cousin Phyllis and I planned a road trip and travelled to Warsaw, Virginia to research the family history at the local county courthouse. The journey ended as we completed our research and obtained copies of the family’s local records at Warsaw’s county offices. Phyllis and I took the road trip to Warsaw, Virginia because we felt the connection to the land that Dilworth-Williams expressed in the excerpt above. Our sentiments, as we stepped foot onto the homestead that year, were similar. Phyllis said, as we stood on the site of our family homestead in the woods of Virginia:

Phyllis: So this is it Cheri. This is where everything began with our grandmothers.

Paulette: Uh-huh.

Phyllis: What were their names?

Paulette: Ellen, Isabelle, and Mary Ellen.

Phyllis: And, this is where [our] grandma (Emma) was born and raised?

Paulette: Yes, Phyl.

Phyllis and Paulette addressed the importance of location connected to the Newton family's homestead, geographical location, and returning back to the homeplace. Stack's (1996) "return migration theme" assist our understanding about the emotional state of the two cousins (Phyllis and Paulette) as they discover their ancestral homeplace.

Phyllis and Paulette were in Warsaw, Virginia! They stood there in wonderment, because they could not believe that they had finally arrived there – the land that was the birthplace and homestead to some of our grandmothers. They glanced around at the remnants of a past life: the fallen and decayed structure that once was the house, mounds of earth budding with greenery amongst broken and cracked dishes, rotted pots and pans and where rusty utensils sprouted.

Phyllis: Cheri, see there's the apple tree in the horizon that Mommie (Ellen) talked about.

Paulette: Where, Phyl? I do not see it.

Phyllis: See, the big apple tree over there? That's the place where two of our grandmothers, Ellen and Isabelle, were buried.

Paulette: Yes. Yes! (in amazement) I see it!

This passage reinforced Phyllis and Paulette's feelings about returning to the family's homestead to connect with the land and therefore the ancestors. The aches in the pit of their stomachs foreshadowed feelings of an epiphany. It was a euphoric moment! Both Phyllis and Paulette were happy in discovering their roots. They were sad because it was part of a past that they could never fully realize – this land, the place where their grandmother Emma was born and raised. The country! It had an uncanny, peculiar effect on both of them as they stood there in silence. It was Phyllis' idea to come to Warsaw. She approached Paulette during the reunion and suggested a road trip since Paulette was the person researching the family history. Both were inquisitive and curious about their heritage.

Paulette and Phyllis, as with the other participants in this study, believed that the Newton homestead connected them to their roots and heritage. Gieryn (2000) provided a theory about homestead/homeplace in Chapter 2. An example, Virginia's narrative, a simple short story that all her cousins knew about corroborates Gieryn's theory.

According to Virginia,

...the family's homestead is located in Richmond County, the village of Warsaw (near Lyles), Virginia. Isabelle Newton bought the land as a result of saving money from the wages she earned as a midwife. The land was purchased from the Carter family for one dollar an acre and was approximately five to six acres.

– WARSAW, 1997, p.33

Virginia's point-of-view reifies the Newton family perspective. Their feelings are in part connected to not only the geographic location of their homestead but also its material form – the land. Most importantly, the meaning of family relatedness and values instilled in family as a result of the daily rituals they experienced at their homeplaces were exhibited throughout their narratives.

My mother (Bernice) and I recollected a discussion when we were at Virginia's funeral in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Rodney (Rod) Taylor (the grandson of Lila Newton) currently pays the taxes on the family's homestead in Warsaw, Virginia. As the story is told by Rod, Carrie (Newton) Jackson, Lila's sister was appointed this duty. Carrie originally intended to pass down this responsibility to her niece Bernice (Patrick) Cross, but she moved to California. Carrie believed the responsibility was too great for someone living so far away, therefore, she appointed her niece, Lena (Newton) Taylor who still lived in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania where the tradition still lies to assume this duty. After Lena's death, the responsibility was passed down to her son, Rod. Carrie, Virginia, Bernice, Paulette, and Rod's narratives emphasized the value of possessing a homeplace/homestead in the family and how belief in this tradition is internalized in the consciousness of family members across generations.

While Phyllis and I were in Warsaw, we visited the homestead and the gravesites of our ancestors at Clarksville Baptist Church since we believe that the cemetery is an extension of homeplace and the idea of "going home" when someone dies. Virginia informed us that,

... all of our family members went to Clarkesville Baptist Church. Most of the family who lived in Warsaw were buried in the cemetery on Effel Road, the street where the church was located when I lived in Warsaw.

— WARSAW, 1997, p. 32

Virginia emphasizes the family's connection to the ancestors, the land, and most importantly the church. Church and community are the sources of pride, along with the biographical information about this church and the Newton family. Phyllis and I learned firsthand about our ancestors, because the other information was engraved on the

headstones. According to Phyllis, Paulette, Bernice, and Virginia's accounts above, I thought it critical to the study to use the following excerpt from the family's history book which speaks to the importance of not only the homeplace but also feelings that encompass it. The emotions become attributes of the family members themselves; namely, their identity as the data shows is inextricably connected to such characteristics as love and caring. The following is recorded:

My Grandmothers strived for an *essence of family* – that connection of relatedness, feeling special because you can identify with your people, and support each other unconditionally. Through it, they provided love and nurturance in their homes that was inexplicably attached to the land. The houses were the nucleus of family traditions, sites of family gatherings, and were the private domestic spaces where people “practiced family.” The houses themselves were dependent upon the survival of the family: we lived, we loved and we fought in them.

– WARSAW, 1997, p. 7.

This passage reveals our ancestral grandmothers' belief in the notion of family. Family characteristics such as relatedness, unconditional love and support, and traditions are important themes. Thus, an important construct to the study is the idea of homeplace as a “site of resistance.” As a site of resistance, the homeplace is where African Americans could freely confront humanization issues, develop a political consciousness, and resist racist stereotypes and oppression. hooks (1990) insists that in the homeplace, “Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts, despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world (pp. 171-172).



*Poetic Expressions and Thoughts of Homeplace:*

*Offspring and Youngsters*

In a personal interview in the living room of my mother's house in West Covina, California on September 8, 2010, Ron responded to the interview questions by submitting a hurriedly written poem below that conveyed his feelings about his "grams" (Bernice's) house where he fully embraced the nostalgia that is attached to his childhood memories. While growing up, Ron would spend summers at his "grams" in West Covina, even though it was located not far from his mother and father's house. But, for Ron, (the oldest grandchild by 10 years) the experiences he shared with his grandmother always conjured up "those warm and cozy" feelings of the special "quality" times that he shared with her. These feelings reveal the love that he feels for his "grams." His poem below fits within the context of what hooks calls "relational love" (p. 39), something that is characteristic of a homeplace or "safe space" where African Americans resist the hostilities faced in the world outside of their homes:

A DAY AT GRAMS HOUSE

I wake to one of my favorite morning aromas.  
Breakfast.  
I am well nourished.

I am told what the Bible says about all of this...  
Lessons.  
I am learned.

The doorbell rings.  
Family.  
I am happy.

Another smell that makes my mouth water.  
Lunch.  
I am stuffed.

There's a key in the door.

More family.  
I am comfortable.

The games come off the shelf.  
Bonding.  
I am having fun.  
Is that my favorite dish?  
Dinner.  
I am delighted.

She tells us stories of her life before today.  
History.  
I am fascinated.

She loves me.  
Love.  
I am loved.

The role of grandmother, food, spirituality/religion and learning life lessons, family, unification, family history, and strong love relationships and caring are themes in the data. The role of grandmother as othermother and caring are principal themes in this passage.

This poem revealed that a pattern exists centering the caring and othermothering shown in the daily routines and rituals of the grandmother, especially from the main speakers' points-of-views. We see these themes repeated in Akiba's poem where the role of her "GrandPop" contrasts the role of the Black grandmother.

### *Finding a Space in Homeplace*

*Akiba – Youngsters' generation.* Akiba's prose addressed the search for a homeplace and the negativity and/or complexities surrounding reconstructing family relationships where none existed previously:

#### ***Cousin P***

*Or should I call her Cousin Suicidal-out there in*

*Mormonville, UT*

*But a girl's gotta get edukated!*

*~smile~*

*Anyway, it was GrandPop's viewing*

*I knew all of 8 people in the room*

*I was nervous and needless to say not looking*

*forward to sitting in a room with a "body"*

*Not my Pop*

*Shoooooot, we used to watch Soul Food on HBO*

*He called them "the stories"*

*He introduced me to a new word: "bulldagger"*

*That was a brand new word*

*He used to watch Moesha, Hardball with Chris*

*Matthews and Judge Mablean all at once*

*Thats right, 3 tv's on at the same time*

*I was blessed enough to meet him in '97*

*He and my mother had the same smile*

*My mother showed me forgiveness through her  
relationship with him*

*He was a cool dude-and he knew it*

*"These are Stacey Adams.. the only shoes I wear,"*

*he informed me with that Granddaddy arrogance and  
charm once, when I complimented him on his shoes*

*Saying goodbye to him messed me up*  
*But God was with me*  
*And so was Cousin P*  
*Before I stepped a foot into the room*  
*I looked up and there was my cousin Paulette*  
*My cousin who'd spent all of 8 minutes with me my*  
*whole life*  
*I just knew her cause I'd never ridden in Benz til*  
*she came to visit*  
*She walked me over to the casket*  
*And when I was about to crumble, she was next to*  
*me literally holdin me up*  
*God just sent her-*  
*And the two of them were right on time.*

The setting of Akiba's poem is her Grand Pop's funeral at Kniffen's<sup>25</sup> Funeral Home in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Funerals, like family reunions, are family gatherings where one sees the functioning of the family. Clearly, the characteristics of many Black families are exhibited at funerals: the love of family members, othermothering, and the functioning of a family during sad times is demonstrated in Akiba's prose. Akiba speaks to a sense of loss that she has experienced intergenerationally – an inheritance so to speak from her mother – in two ways. Firstly, she discussed the loss of her grandfather

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<sup>25</sup> Kniffen's was the only funeral home in Wilkes-Barre where Black people could patronize, since other morticians discriminated against them. I remember that as a little girl I would accompany my mother to the funeral parlor where she earned extra money straitening Black ladies hair.

Lawrence whom she recently met a few years prior to his death. Secondly, Akiba connected her grandfather's loss to the non-existent relationships in which she was not a participant in the Newton family. This feeling compounds the notion of loss for her family suggested by the short time in which she was reunited with her cousin Paulette. Although these seemingly are negative experiences, the fact that her mother inserted herself through Akiba at the 2002 family reunion in New York and at her grandpop's funeral are subtle hints about the power of kinship, love and inclusion – the caring piece that almost always surface in many African American families. A perfect example is seen in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

*Paulette – Offspring's generation.* I could have never realized when writing the below-mentioned poem that it would appear in a dissertation. Now, in retrospect, I am drawn to why my mother's and grandmother's houses were so meaningful to me. The houses would be defined by today's standards as unattractive. But for me, the houses represented good times, happiness, and love. Needless to say, they were inextricably the fabric that connected me to my family. The fact that the socioeconomic status relegated us [the Newton family] as poor – as were most of our friends and neighbors seemed completely irrelevant. No. 3 Constine Court impacted my life, since prior to moving into these houses, my immediate family lived in small, run-down apartments that my mother (Bernice) converted into cozy, attractive homeplaces much like hooks and Walker described. However, once the family moved up into "The Court" it was a remarkable improvement over the other places where we lived. Most importantly, it was a critical period in my life since my mother became employed by the Social Security Administration, separated from my father, and was pregnant with my sister Valerie.

Nonetheless, as the data shows, the implications of the role of grandmother and mother coupled with an attractive home environment had a positive effect on the children, because it emphasized the value of love, nurture, family relationships (the idea of what it means to be a family through “thick and thin”) and having a homeplace. These are my memories:

### No. 3 Constine Court

That row of nine obscure houses  
 Setting back off the street with a lot in front  
 Our first *real home* ---  
 A two-story, six-room house with a cellar and a back yard  
 No. 3 Constine Court will always stay in my memories  
 That house which God blessed with a baby girl, Valerie  
 Where we watched our first programs on a new blond television set  
 Where fragrances of gladiolas, tulips, and daisies from  
     mother's garden filled the air  
 Where *the government* hired Mom to work for them  
 Where I received my second dog, Queenie, a German Shepherd  
     from the man that ran over my Black Cocker Spaniel  
 No. 3 --- that was *our house* in *The Court*  
*The Court*, a family of peoples:  
 The Hadvances, Calkins, Storms, Eberhardts and Grays  
 Neighbors who gathered on hot evenings in the lot  
 And gossiped with each other  
 While children played games of hide and seek, jacks,  
     Double-dutch, tag, and cowboys and Indians  
 And even caught lightening bugs  
 Right in front of No. 3 Constine Court

That house which hosted scout meetings  
 Sheltered us during lunch hours at home from school  
     where we talked of recess activities and church school  
 And as home to many friends for a night or a weekend  
     or even the whole summer  
 No. 3 Constine Court

Attending choir rehearsal and Vacation Bible School  
     at Mt. Zion Baptist Church  
 happened while living at No. 3  
     Learning to swim at the “Y”  
     Trick or treating for UNICEF at Halloween

No matter where we were or how far  
 Coming up Hazel Street across the tracks  
 Or going down Main Street past Abe's Hot Dog Stand  
 And turning down Cinderella Street  
 From a day of swimming at Minor Park for so long  
 That the journey home we searched for soda bottles  
 To buy candy and pretzels to ease the hunger pains  
 From a marvelous day of water games  
 It seemed as if No. 3 would never appear in sight.

But there it is --- the lot  
                     and No. 3 Constine Court  
                     our house  
                     setting among a row of nine obscure houses

OUR FIRST REAL HOME!!!

– WARSAW, Cross, 1997, p. 60.

“The Court” as a space for homeplace fits the recurring theme of pride, home and progress that become the overarching themes in the first stanza. Family, uplift in socio-economic status, gardening, new employment, kindness, and finally the house centered in “the Court” are highlighted in the second stanza. In the third stanza, we see “The Court” become a space for extended family/friends “homeplace” that includes the diversity of the neighbors. Neighbors who exhibit familial-type relationships are the overarching themes in this passage. Related to homeplace, the rituals reoccur from the previous stanza to show the ordinariness of everyday life. Family socialization provides meaning in the ways of everyday life: organizations, church, school, home life, businesses, recreational activities, and the narrator’s reminiscence about a homeplace in past times conjures up remembrance.

*Jonathan – Youngster’s generation.* Jonathan is one of the youngest members of this generation, and actually was born after his paternal grandmother, Lorraine, passed

away. Nevertheless, Jonathan heard stories about grandma Lorraine and had this to say about her:

The only stories I hear are about my Grandma Lorraine. Like my Mom says, “she is like the best mother-in-law she has known,” because she was caring and a really lovable person.

– *Interview, November 14, 2010*

Here, it is apparent that Jonathan is discussing the notions of love and caring that include the role of his grandmother. However, attached to these sentiments is how Jonathan feels about his father, also. When asked questions about the role of the Black grandmother/father Jonathan shared the following,

...my Dad...is a real good father. [He] cares about his kids and wife and everything and [he] loves everyone in the family...he just has a lot of respect for everyone in the family and does not judge people quickly...

– *Interview, November 14, 2010*

I was challenged with Jonathan’s young age and short answers; however, he answered every single question given to him. The interview (by telephone) was approximately 30 minutes long – a short time when one thinks about the brevity of the information. In many instances, because he was very young, the answers to questions were not readily available. Jonathan hesitated and pondered each question thinking about what I believe were the appropriate answers. However, when it came to questions about his immediate family, he did not hesitate to respond. With this passage above, Jonathan emphasizes the value of having a family that loves, respects and cares about you. In contrast to his extended family members, the central person in his life is his father.



*Youngsters: A Different Homeplace*

Telisa and Ronald were only 2 of 8 participants of the *Youngsters* generation who spoke about differences between the generations. In my opinion, the other participants were intimidated by the dissertation process. That is, I believe the nature of the topic, the fact that they are participating in a dissertation project led to a tendency for them to speak only about positive experiences or to romanticize family relationships. The data in this section is part of the conversation that took place at Telisa and Ron's grandmother's home in West Covina, California on September 8, 2010.

Telisa King's perspective below begins to tease out the differences between the generations and their homeplaces, and why (unlike some of her peers) she has an alternative perspective about her grandmother's house. Telisa lived a block away from her grandmother (Bernice), who played a central role in her formative years. Grandma (Bernice) was the primary caretaker when Telisa was a child. During those years when she grew up, she spent as much time at her mother and father's house as her grandmother's house. Telisa states,

Because I have lived with both my mother and my grandmother I think I have a unique perspective on the world in comparison to most people my age. In general, the youth of America is not concerned with the culture and substance of life that existed over the span of sixty plus years ago. When my Grandmother speaks about doing the jitterbug, the swing, wearing "slips," buying bread for a nickel and other such generational nuances I can only laugh in disbelief at the reality of only 2 generations ago. I am reminded of the lives of so many people that were the youth during the 1930's. One major characteristic of those that grew up during the great depression is the importance of family and how that interdependence led to survival throughout one of the most trying times in American history! So, of course because of the Depression I have learned that you really do not need much money to make a good meal and buy or make fashionable clothing. From my grandmother I have learned to be a strong woman and that if you want something accomplished you've got to "straighten up and fly right." Because of my Grandmother, all of the jazz greats such as Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald are not names one blurts out during trivial pursuit. These musicians mean something

to me, as they should: the 1930's, (*Telisa laughs*) meatloaf, Russian dish, the home she has created for all of her children!

— *Personal Interview, September 8, 2010*

Telisa is extremely family-oriented and values the role that her grandmother has played in her life, and the lessons she learned while visiting and/or living with her. Themes seen in this passage are: othermothering, strength, the notion of “making do” (connected to financial management), heritage, and the appreciation and love for family. Within this scope, Telisa internalized daily rituals such as the food that her grandma prepares (meatloaf and Russian dish<sup>26</sup>). These are a few critical assets of the homeplace that I sense Telisa feels has been lost in her generation, *othermothering* being a principle theme here (see Collins’ (2000) discussion about this subject in Chapter 2).

One of the principle roles that Telisa’s grandmother played within the family was “othermothering.” She assisted all of her children as caretaker. The discussion of James’ story in Chapter 2 parallels a family story where my grandmother (Emma) provided a similar model for my mother (Bernice) and her siblings as seen in the following excerpt:

Everyone came to Mrs. Patrick’s house  
when they needed a place to stay or food to eat,  
Mom said.

Grandma was a very generous woman.  
She always had a pot of stew and cornbread  
for all to eat or an extra room in her house  
for someone to stay. Anytime we visited Grandma’s  
house, there was always a strange person or two  
around the kitchen table or on the front porch  
or out in the back yard.  
(WARSAW, 1997, p. 58)

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<sup>26</sup> This dish is a family tradition as my mother fixed it for her children, and currently prepares it for her grandchildren. As the story is told, my mother got the recipe from an old Russian lady living in Wilkes-Barre, PA. The ingredients consist of ground beef, whole kernel corn, bell peppers, stewed tomatoes and onions with tomato sauce. Likened to a goulash, it is cheap, easy to fix, and feeds big families.

My Grandmother (Emma) acted as an “othermother” to her grandchildren and their friends and also, she was considered as a “community” mother to people visiting her home. Similarly, Telisa’s grandma (Bernice) acted in much the same way. Telisa is aware of her grandma’s role in her life and in the lives of the various relatives in the Newton family. Telisa’s narrative subtly hints at the oral tradition and knowledge transmission in her family (without really naming it) and shows that she learned from her grandmother. In other words, through Telisa we witness how King’s (1976) assertion that orality places the “*Elders*” or “*griot*”<sup>27</sup> at the center of the family is a reality in the Newton family. Thus, it is evident that Bernice (Patrick) Cross of the *Elders* generation in the study is a “holder of wisdom,” too.

Another dominant theme connected to the “sense of loss” articulated by the *Youngsters* generation is the idea of assimilation that we see in the following discussion. The guiding question was, “Who do you see as people passing down information; that is, who are the people you learn from?”

Me: I am reading articles that talk about the evolution of family for example from slavery to the present time and how family changes. Ron said that I [Paulette] grew up with my cousins and other relatives and saw them everyday. In those days when everyone lived in the same general area, it was easy and not a hardship [to see one’s relatives often]. Part of the work of this study is looking at how family changes, the role of family, and how that role impacts individual strains of the family. For example, the study looks at the idea of values and investigates what we learn from the family and how that knowledge passes down from generation-to-generation. Whom do you see as the most important teachers in the family and what lessons did you learn from them? Can you tell me a story that you remember hearing about in our family?

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<sup>27</sup> In traditional African culture, the griot’s sole purpose is to revitalize the history or “keep it alive” by telling and re-telling the stories about the villages and homelands of Africa that speak to the Black existence.

Ron: It would be just grandma (Bernice), Aunt Marion and you [Paulette]. I do not know anybody else. To me when we talk about the Newton-Patrick-Smith family those are the only people who are keeping the fire burning. I do not know. Those are the only three I can think of.

– *Focus Group,*  
*September 7, 2010, p 4*

Besides the theme of the *Elders* talked about previously, Ron and Telisa explored the nuances surrounding the caring and personal accountability as they discuss and question which family members are the “glue” that keeps the Newton family together. A “sense of loss” occurs as both of them speak about good family members versus bad ones. Ron believed the reason why the *Elders* and *Offspring* generations do not make differentiations amongst family members is because they have “unconditional love.”

Themes in this passage include: caring, community, and community mothering as I discussed above in relationship to Grandma Emma who was a community mother. Collins (2000) helps us to understand Grandma Emma’s perspective about caring and her activism to embrace people in the community.

Me: And so you name those three people, what are some things that you learned from those people. When you say grandma who...

Ron: Well, my grandmother’s name is Bernice Cross. I think in their daily lives, family is a priority. I will go further to say family, and this definition being the whole 122 family members, is important to you three. It is a priority in your daily lives. I think once you leave you three, it’s not a priority. And so, just to say that in conversations with any of you at any time the importance of family comes out in normal conversations. Whereas, if you’re talking to our cousins or aunts and uncles you won’t hear it...it may never come up.

– *Focus Group,*  
*September 7, 2010, p 4*

Ron believes that only three people in the entire Newton family are committed to its success. (Later in the discussion, he added Tiombe’s name, also.)

Telisa: Your saying eventually in conversation?

Ron: Well, I'm saying it comes up often when you talk to those three, Aunt Marion, Bernice Cross, or Paulette Cross. Or, beyond that if you are talking, for example, to Audra, Becky, or Tasha then it's not. I do not know. I may not have had enough conversations with those people.

Telisa: That's a hard question.

– *Focus Group,*  
*September 7, 2010, p 4*

For Ron, on the one hand, the notion of family is nonexistent in the conversations [my emphasis “outside of family reunions”]. On the other hand, whenever family discussions occur in the presence of Bernice, Marion, and Paulette, one can expect a dialogue about the maintenance of the Newton family as a whole.

Me: So, Ron, so these are the people you brought up: your grandmother, your auntie and your mother...so what are the lessons? Give me an example of a lesson that you have learned.

Ron: A lesson? The importance of family I guess. I mean that's what I am saying. It's something you can tell is and should be important to those three people: our family, our legacy, and what we are doing as a unit. Whereas, some of the conversations we have outside of those three people even if it is important it's not talked about. So, if it is not said, silence equals death. (*Ron & Telisa laugh*).

– *Focus Group,*  
*September 7, 2010, p 4*

Ron compared silence to death of the family; therefore, silence is a major theme coupled with the sense of “loss of family heritage/culture” – both are overarching themes in the above-mentioned passage.

Telisa: It's hard for me to trust or want to interact with these types of relatives. For instance, my cousins are at least ten years older than I am. Now they are grown up and they have kids of their own and yet are irresponsible...yotta, yotta, yotta...why would I communicate with such a person? I do not want to be influenced

by them. Irresponsibility is not an attractive quality. Besides, when you interact with them, they always end up asking you for money. Those kinds of interactions are discouraging to me, therefore, I do not want to get to know all of my cousins on a personal level.

– *Focus Group,*  
September 7, 2010, p 4

In Telisa's response, themes such as trust, irresponsibility, communication and self-sufficiency arise.

Telisa: I am not saying that to just be malicious or anything 'cause everyone has their time, but it always seems to be about the same thing [money] or the same people asking for it. Personal requests are okay occasionally when you might have to deal with them because they are your family. I do not know. I do not know if that's the case. Because someone is your family you have to let them walk over you.

– *Focus Group,*  
September 7, 2010, p 4

Here, family dynamics, manipulation, and family are juxtaposed against the positive values seen in previous narratives. The notion of family is put to a test.

I think the longer you reside in these United States, the more you assimilate and the more the definition [of family] change. The definition of family for the Newtons seems to be changing because what Telisa states is true. But, I believe that in the "old days," (and I will speak for the three of you, in particular), that how did you say it Telisa? "Why would anyone want to be around people who were incarcerated? Or, why would anyone want to fraternize with people who have no money or influence?" I think the answers lie in the role of family and its belief systems for the three of you. Whether or not members of the family are challenged by their circumstances, the idea is they are still part of the family and therefore you all support them.

Ron – *Focus Group,*  
September 7, 2010, p 4

Assimilation, negative family traits and incarceration, fraternization and the role of family members are key themes in this passage.

*Patrick – Youngster’s generation.* Patrick was asked similar questions about the stories he heard and the lessons he learned from family. He shared his feelings in the following passages:

Very good questions. My Dad definitely loved to tell stories, and he is great at it... because he has recall of memory as if he was just there. He is always telling me interesting stories, and I love to listen to them. A story that sticks out is about my grandmother, Ernestine Patrick...that she cleaned houses for a living when she was younger and having nine children; she was a bartender at one point. That story inspired me to think, “Wow! That is a tough job.” A low job, cleaning houses as a Black woman back then. That story inspires me!

I learned strength and perseverance from that story. That’s in our blood. Because when you looked at my grandmother, she always had a nice house and was well put together and always looked elegant. The value is that it was inspiring to me to be strong and to carry on whether or not it is a difficult job or things you have to find and do what you have to do to survive. There is a lot of value in that little story but it has a big value to me.

– Patrick

Similar to the aforementioned narrative of Telisa, Patrick’s narrative told about his love and appreciation for his grandmother who has been an inspiration in his life. Patrick is genuinely appreciative of Grandma Ernestine’s past and the fact that she survived in a hostile world that oppressed her (shown by the menial jobs that she held). Nevertheless, Patrick’s grandmother was a positive role model and he thought highly of her.

About learning to be a Black man in society, yes, I have my Dad who is a dark-skinned Black man with really White teeth who is from Chicago, Illinois. And my mother is a really White blond-headed woman from the back mountains of Pennsylvania. My Dad said, “I can walk into the hood of New York or I can walk into White society and speak very eloquently...articulate for a Black man.” So, he very much is not like societal depictions of a Black man. He always dresses nicely and presents himself well. Which reminds me of one other story, too, about my grandfather, Lawrence Patrick who always wore a shirt with a pocket in it. No matter when you saw him, he always dressed neatly as a Black

man. I have learned to carry myself well...people always say to me that you are the Whitest Black man that I know. But, I am half Black, and he [my Grandfather] did influence my Dad and now he influenced me.

– Patrick

In contrast to most of the aforementioned narratives, the role of father and grandfather and their homeplaces surface in this passage, as it did in Patrick's cousin, Akiba's poem. Similarly, Patrick sees value and is appreciative for the kind of roles both men played in his life. A constant image is the role of his grandmother and her house, also that Patrick equally praises.

Caring, and empathy [or lack of] are overarching themes of this data chunk. On the one hand, caring by the *Elders* is extended to the family overall. On the other hand, two participants of the *Youngster* generation seemingly lack empathy to their peers or embrace those of "less fortunate circumstances." Resistance and opposition are other underlying themes here. Given the discussion above about homeplace, "relational love" and the "sense of loss" (assimilation) that has occurred among the *Youngster* generation moves us into the final subsection of this chapter, Making a Home in a Restless World.

### *Making a Home in a Restless World*

At this historical moment, Black people are experiencing a deep collective sense of "loss." Nostalgia for times past is intense, evoked by awareness that feelings of bonding and connection that seemed to hold Black people together are swiftly eroding. We are divided. Assimilation rooted in internalized racism further separates us. (hooks, p.36)

The above excerpt relates to the safety of Blacks in the United States from slavery through the present time. Of the 22 participants comprising the data, there were 4 *Ancestors*; 6 *Elders* and 3 responses (Viola, Virginia, and Lena); 4 *Offspring* and 1



response (Paulette); and 8 *Youngsters* and 2 responses (Ron and Telisa). Besides the *Ancestors* and *Elders*, Ron and Telisa were the only 2 who discussed uncomfortable subjects like disintegration of Black families and assimilation. I should mention that Akiba, also, lightly touched upon the idea of broken relationships in family and one way to mend them. In that light, the excerpt above prefaces the topic of restlessness as witnessed in the last 2 generations in the United States. Viola, Virginia, Lena, and Paulette addressed the issue of Jim Crow. Ron discussed his concern about family roles and functions such as the interrelatedness and connection not only between immediate family members and their individual strains of the Newton family, but also, cross-generationally.

*Jim Crow and “Unsafe Times”*

Virginia said “Aunt Emma didn’t like Jim Crow -- jumping to the whip of the White man. Aunt Emma didn’t like the country, and she wanted her children to be where there was more of a choice of marriage.”

WARSAW, 1997, p. 40

Viola’s quote is representative of the Jim Crow era, and parallels Virginia’s excerpt above. Viola said,

I think our family was brave with all that they went through...Jim Crow<sup>28</sup> and all. Despite all of this, they still stuck together. The family was strong inspite of what went on. Our Grandmothers were *Women Warriors*. Our family took a whipping and still kept up together. Our Grandmothers were brave women; they kept the family together.

– Viola Jackson, WARSAW, 1997, p. 44

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<sup>28</sup> Jim Crow laws legally enforced racial segregation in the U.S. South after the Civil War from the Reconstruction period (1877) to the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement (1930s). “Jim Crow” was the name of a minstrel routine.

All of my life I heard stories about the hostile environment of the South, which was the reason that we (the offspring) were born above the Mason-Dixon Line. As the story is told:

Grandma's dream was  
to move above the Maxon-Dixon Line . . .  
to go North to marry and have her children  
in a better land . . .to escape Jim Crow

– WARSAW, 1997, p. 8

The times then were perilous, because White supremacy, racism, and racial segregation persisted and was very much part of the fabric of American culture. The times were truly unsafe for Black folks, and many found ways much like my grandmother (Emma) to migrate North. Lena's narrative about the fire on the homestead in Virginia reifies this point:

#### THE FIRE

“Grandma had two houses,” Lena said. One burned down and Uncle Robert built her another one. He built it when I was six years old.”

“I would go with Grandma everyday to watch Uncle Robert. He was a carpenter, and I used to hand him the nails.”  
Grandma used to pack lunch, and she would go up everyday to work on the house.

“Great Grandma's house was built from the ground by Grandma Mary Ellen. I used to sit with Great Grandma and she used to tell me stories about the Civil War. After the Civil War when the soldiers came, she was scared of all those White people bringing all their money and their kind of civilization to the South. Isabelle was a little girl during the Civil War.”

“I was seven when Great Grandma got burned in the fire. The house wasn't completely built. We went to take Pearl home and that is when the

house burned down.  
 Flames were all around, and we  
 couldn't get her."

"I remember that Great Grandma was tall and thin  
 and smoked a pipe."  
 – WARSAW, 1997, p. 34

This story about grandma (Isabelle) was passed down through the generations for us to understand the danger of the South. Grandma Isabelle's house was on the part of the land that had a stream. In an effort for the White folks to take over the land, and thus have control over the water, they burned grandma's house down three times. The third time, she was burned alive in it.

White supremacy and racial segregation were overt actions that oppressed Blacks and are the reasons for the great migration to the Northern Cities. In the North, however, racism was subtle. Ron and Telisa discussed the subtle forms of racism such as "disintegration" and "assimilation" that many Blacks living in urban cities face, along with those in predominantly White cities. Ron's discussion directly addresses the two issues, disintegration and assimilation while Telisa's responses include ways in which African Americans resist White supremacy through the influences of *Elders*.

Ron discussed his concern about family roles and functions such as the interrelatedness and connection not only between immediate family members and their individual strains of the Newton family; but also, cross-generationally.

Researcher: Well, Telisa, you mention in the Black family the *Elders* are important and one of the characteristics of the Black family is that we revere our *Elders*. You see that at every family reunion, because the program includes honoring both our *Elders* and our ancestors. So, yes, *Elders* are very important. But, do we learn from the *Elders*? I'm trying to get at this, because part of my work of the study is to explore the production of knowledge from generation-to-generation. So, I am trying to find out which ways

we do that, right? What things survive and what things do not? Right now, as I listen [to you and Ron] I am thinking we lost some things through the generations. So, one of the things I want to ask pointedly is have you learned anything as a member of this Black family in terms of how to be a better Black man or woman, etc.? I shouldn't say better. Let me rephrase the question, what have you learned in your family about how to be a Black man/woman in society?

Telisa: Well I think the reason the family is disintegrating or whatever you want to call it is because people took responsibility for other people and now people do not. Like for instance like people in our family are in trouble in our immediate even on this side and we do not take personal precautions for them . . . “you did that to yourself and that’s your problem.” And I feel like maybe in your day even at family reunions for example ten years ago when everyone was alive everyone made it there because people took responsibility for payment for other people. It doesn’t happen anymore because people maybe...

Telisa believed that one of the losses in African American culture is that young adults are irresponsible, so the idea of personal accountability in contemporary times does not prevail. She struggles to understand the reason for this loss and attributes responsibility as a characteristic of the older generations. Ron, too, is challenged to rationalize the differences or changes in the current generations and sums it up as a loss – disintegration of the family in his account below:

Uhhh. I do not know if I really have a role. I think the only thing I know now is just hearing stories from the old days is seeing the uh - our family fall apart. I do not know if I have a role. But I probably am not comfortable with the idea of our family disintegrating.

Tucker and James (2005) article, “New Families, New Functions: Postmodern African American Families in Context” point out that families have generally become less kin based:

By necessity, family roles have had to be renegotiated and reconstructed when functions dictated by the “modern” nuclear model were unattainable, inappropriate or no longer desirable. (p. 90)

Family roles have changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and therefore, the “restlessness” that occurs in the *Youngster* generation can be applied across African American young adults, such as Ron, who yearns for a return to family roles that are characteristic of Black folk in the last century while, Telisa grapples with the need for family roles of the past. The complexity of this, however, lies in the changing dynamics of African American families. An important trend in family relations and functions that Tucker and James point out is the socio-emotional functions of maintaining family cohesion in the context of greater geographic dispersion. In the past, when relatives moved away, an occasional letter would suffice. Currently, however, increasing trends show:

The proportion of families that are geographically distant is constantly increasing. The demands on kin to maintain familial connections and support systems is ever more challenging in this context and may be a crucial factor in the increased isolation of the Elderly. The African American investment in the tradition of family reunions is one strategy for counteracting this tendency toward greater dispersion. (Tucker and James, 2005, p. 96)

As Tucker and James suggest, Ron struggles since he is unable to find an answer to counteract the reality that geography coupled with negative family relationships, plays out in reunifying the family. Thus, the challenge for both Telisa and Ron will be to rely on their memories to make connections about the role of the family in the past in comparison to the lack of family roles that currently exist.

### *Disintegration of the Newton Family*

My grandmother’s (Emma’s) death caused a major breakdown in the family, because the tradition of gathering as family at Christmastime, Thanksgiving, or Easter for

dinners at her house did not occur. Insight into this situation is given by James (1993) in Chapter 3 who encountered a similar experience when her grandmother passed away in 1988. However, her death “served to reunite physically and emotionally all of her living children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and a host of other biological and fictive kin” (p. 44). From my point-of-view, I believed

...the houses, like our Grandmothers, affirmed our existence. We felt whole and connected to each other because of the daily and weekly rituals that were performed there: Sunday dinners, holiday gatherings, birthday parties that included spankings<sup>29</sup>, arguments and debates between the *Elders*, and the many expressions of love. Everyone rejoiced the homesteads of our Grandmothers, whether or not they were in Warsaw, Virginia; Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; or West Covina, California. A tradition of family carries forth from one location to another, wherever the family resides.

– WARSAW, Paulette Cross, 1997, p. 7

From a BFW perspective, the ethics of caring were utilized to explore hooks’ (1990) notion of *homeplace* and her “nostalgia for a sense of place and belonging and togetherness” for Black folks to know each other again. For hooks, *homeplace* is where African Americans exercised power and were “truly caring and supportive of one another” (p. 35). hooks’ “yearning” for a sense of community and Black culture where she imagines a daily life where she can see brown and Black faces of her people speaks to the changing dynamics of the postmodern African American family that Tucker and James (2005) detail in their discussion. The study revealed that this change is occurring in the *Youngster* generation and might be characteristic across African American families

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<sup>29</sup> Dodge, McLoyd, and Lansford (2005) discuss the parental task of disciplining children. Use of corporal punishment is a discipline practice that, on average, differentiates African American families from European American families, although this difference is shrinking across time. They identify cultural and contextual factors that may underlie not only this difference, but also race differences in the endorsement of corporal punishment and the effects of physical discipline on children’s development (pp. 15-16).

as the “yearning” for a return to family roles that are characteristic of Blacks in the last century. The complexity of this, however, lies in the changing dynamics of African American families that Taylor and James discuss in Chapter 3. Given these trends in the state of African American families, a BFW lens assists our ability to connect the broad scope of the life experiences to daily life in the Newton family, where for example, it gathers occasionally in the homeplace. As Ron states,

...the more we assimilate...the [greater void it creates with]... the next generations. The idea of family may not be a reason enough to deal with the people who we are just talking about who are your family by blood even though they are not individuals that you would spend time with.

Ron is concerned about family functions - the interrelatedness and connection not only between immediate family members and their individual strains of the Newton family, but also, cross-generationally. According to Tucker and James currently, however, increasing trends show:

The proportion of families that are geographically distant is constantly increasing. The demands on kin to maintain familial connections and support systems is ever more challenging in this context and may be a crucial factor in the increased isolation of the Elderly. The African American investment in the tradition of family reunions is one strategy for counteracting this tendency toward greater dispersion. (p. 96)

Thus, the frustration exhibited by both Telisa and Ron centers upon the changing dynamics of the African American family in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Both participants, similar to hooks, yearn for the “old days” and the ways in which family members interacted. They rely on their memories to make connections about the role of the family in the past in comparison to the lack of family roles that currently exist.

This chapter revealed contradictions surrounding homeplaces between generations. The *Ancestors* believed in homeplace as a safe place to protect them from

Jim Crow laws. The *Elders* and the *Offspring* believed in teaching the family about the ills of the South as a coping strategy to protect them – all taught in the safety of their homes. The *Youngsters* contradicted the normalized way in which the Newton family functioned, because assimilation disrupted the values instilled in them by previous generations, therefore, we witness a subtle disintegration of the African American family and its values.

However, a complete understanding connected to homeplace means understanding the Black racial socialization practices, and how they are internalized amongst the Newton family members. The aforementioned are the central themes in Chapter 5 of the study. Thus, Chapter 4 answers the questions about African American literature informing the Black homeplace and its African American children. The themes revealed the Newton family stories that fostered family youth with racial socialization and internalization of cultural values and beliefs in the home and community.



## CHAPTER 6

### BLACK FAMILY REUNIONS: A PLACE FOR RACIAL SOCIALIZATION

#### *The Genesis of the Newton Family: Beginnings of a Family Tree*

Black racial socialization is, centered in this section, and demonstrated in the ways the Newton family practices it. For example, my Grandmother Emma knew the importance of genealogy, and used an historical context and the oral tradition as a way to educate her two oldest daughters Bernice and Marion about Newton family history.

Later, after many years have passed, I replicated Grandma Emma's story in *WARSAW*:

*The Newton Family History Book.* As the story was told by my mother Bernice:

It was the summer of 1956 or '57, Aunt Carrie and Cousin Stella were visiting Mama in Wilkes-Barre from Washington, D.C. Aunt Sarah was visiting, too.

*Mama said,  
"Bernice, these ancestors lived during the Civil War."*

*Mama said,  
"Ellen Newton is your Great, Great Grandmother. Isabelle is your Great Grandmother and was her only child."*

*Mama said,  
"Ellen Newton's first daughter, Matilda, did not have any children. Her husband William Napper was killed by a bull in 1922. Willie Henderson, possible son of William Napper, lived in Washington, D.C."*

*Mama said,  
"Robert Bailey, brother of Isabelle and my Great Uncle got Isabelle from slavery who was sold."*

*Mama said,*

*"Hannah is your Great, Great Aunt and had a son named Chastine." Great Aunt Hannah Newton cooked for the Joneses until she lost her eyesight. She would get up before daybreak to cook."*

*Mama said,*

*"My cousin was Hannah's daughter. Her name is Stella and she is Tudor's mother. Cousin Stella worked for Congressman Jones, also. He was very prejudice. Cousin Stella was a maid and Aunt Hannah was the cook. Hannah lived on Congressman Jones' place and had to work and never was able to own any land."*

*Mama said,*

*"Henry had eight children: Minnie, Isabelle, Elizabeth, Mary Ann, Martha, Hattie and Cornelius (the only boy). Your Great Uncle Henry was killed by automobile in 1934."*

*Mama said,*

*"Stella's children were Mollie, Bell, Giles, Ana, Louise, Henry, Chastine (a male nicknamed Tudor), James and Harvey."*

*Mama said,*

*"Isabelle is your Great Grandmother and Mary Ellen is your Grandmother. I am her oldest child. There was Delia, Sarah, George (who died at infancy), Carrie, Henry, Lillian, Lina, and Lila. And Bunyon who died as a baby."*

*Mama said,*

*"The family homestead is in Richmond County, village of Warsaw, near Lyles, Virginia. Isabelle Newton was a midwife and bought the land from Mrs. Carter."*

*Mama said,*

*"My Great Aunt Matilda Newton Napper and my Grandmother bought their land together. Isabelle Newton bought the land in 1890. She joined William Napper."*

*Mama said,*

*"A knot grew on Isabelle's side (probably from leaning against the washboard). She fell out on the road and was brought home.  
"Bernice, that was your Great Grandmother."*

Aunt Marion's version deviated from the oral tradition because it was a textual presentation and her version of the story was shorter. According to Aunt Marion:

*I was home visiting Wilkes-Barre from New York. It was 1955. Mama and I were sitting out front on the glider. It was hot and Mama was drinking one of her*

*favorite drinks – a tall, cool glass of cherry Kool-Aid with a long ice tea spoon mixing the ice cubes back and forth as she talked.*

*Mama said,*

*“Ellen Newton had five children: Matilda, Robert Bailey, Isabelle, Hannah and Henry.”*

*Mama said,*

*“Robert Bailey lived until 1922.”*

*Mama said,*

*“He went and got Isabelle after the Civil War. He remembered where she was a slave at.”*

*Mama said,*

*“Isabelle had only one child, my mother, Mary Ellen Newton. I was my mother’s oldest child, and my father’s name was Palmer Mead.”*

*Mama said,*

*“My sisters Delia and Sarah and my brother George’s father was named Robert Berman.”*

*Mama said,*

*“George died as a baby. I remember his small casket.”*

*Mama said,*

*“Carry, Henry, Lilly, Lina, Lila and Bunyon’s father was Willie Brown.”  
I can’t remember too well, said Aunt Marion, but I think...*

*Mama said,*

*“Bunyon died as a baby, too.”*

*But, I do not remember in what order he fell in line with his other brother and sisters.*

*Mama did tell me about someone drowning. That’s why she didn’t want us near water.*

*Mama said,*

*“Henry had a daughter named Minnie.”*

*Mama said,*

*“Hannah’s children were Chastine, Stella, Mary Ellen, Bessie and Mamie.”*

*Paulette, share this with Bea.*

– WARSAW, 1997, pp. 72-74

My analysis of the story, *Mama said*, centered the oral tradition – the storyteller and storytelling – as a method and/or practice in which some Black folk passed information down to their family from generation-to-generation. The words *Mama said* functioned as a rhetorical in the telling of the story since *Mama said* was repeated at strategic intervals in the storytelling by my mother Bernice and my Aunt Marion both of whom introduced and presented a new piece of biographical information about my Great, Great, Great Grandmother Ellen’s children.

My mother, like Grandma Emma, functioning as griot, uttered *Mama said* through voice inflections at specific intervals and hesitated as she introduced a new piece of information. Similarly, my Aunt Marion’s written text (noted on a fragment of worn paper written hurriedly as she labored to jot down the information as grandma spoke it) followed the *griot-like* tradition via the use of punctuation such as commas and paragraph indentations that functioned much like the oral rendition of the story. For example, the first and second stanzas of the story (that functions in the family history book as prose) begins:

*Mama said,  
Bernice, these ancestors lived during the Civil War.*

*Mama said,  
Ellen Newton is your great, great grandmother.  
Isabelle is your great grandmother.  
Her daughter Mary Ellen is your grandmother and was her only child.*

The refrain – the phrase that is repeated at intervals like the chorus of a song – *Mama said* functions in a rhetorical form that brings meaning and understanding to its content.

Both my mother and aunt uttered and wrote consecutively the repetitious phrase at the beginning of their stories. In the oral rendition, the tone of my mother’s voice changed to

emphasize certain words like *Mama said* with a hesitancy that introduced the forthcoming words.

My Aunt Marion's written text corroborated this ordering of the story noted by the indentations for the words *Mama said* at each new paragraph of information.

I wrote in *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book*:

The power of the oral tradition is revealed in [the story] where Grandma Emma passes down the family's history to my mother, Bernice Cross, and my aunt Marion Patrick. Ironically, at the time that I requested this information from my mother, she used the art of oral history to pass this information along, like Grandma. Amazingly, Aunt Marion, too, delivered the information as her mother and sister did and also sent the stories in writing to me. The written stories completely concurred with my mother's version, give or take a few facts.

Bernice and Marion's action, passing on information, directly connects to Auslander's, (2002) discussion about African Americans' "sense of nostalgia and longing" for the history of their relatives. This emotion is seen in Alex Haley's *Roots* where the genealogical connection to the book and the film is the central thesis.

#### *The Family History Project – 1981*

The following passage that I wrote in *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book* is significant, because it follows the main thesis of my dissertation, the oral tradition. In the below-mentioned excerpt, we observe young Ronald approaching several members of the family for assistance in [re]constructing his family history for a family tree assignment:

#### ***MY SON RON'S PROJECT***

*In September 1981 my son, Ron, approached me and my mother about the history of our family. He had a school project about the family tree, and he knew that I was interested in our family and was compiling some information about it. I, in turn, approached my mother,*

*Bernice Cross, her sister my Aunt Marion and their cousin Lena and together we put the following history together which Ron prepared, typed, and presented our family as a school project and received an A+.*

**MY FAMILY HISTORY**  
**by Ronald P. Nickens**

*My Great Grandmother Emma Newton is responsible for my family knowing of our ancestors. She reminisced (and was proud of the fact that she could remember past relations and recall certain facts about their lives) throughout the years. Grandma Emma often told stories that were fascinating to us, reaching into the past as far back as my Great, Great, Great, Great Grandmother Ellen Newton.*

*My Great, Great, Great, Great Grandmother Ellen Newton had five children: Robert, Hannah, Matilda, Isabel and Henry. My Great, Great, Great Uncle Robert fought in the Civil War and died in 1922. Not much is known about my Great, Great, Great, Great Grandmother Ellen Newton.*

*Grandma Isabelle Newton, Great Uncle Robert's younger sister, was sold into slavery when she was about ten years old. After the Civil War<sup>30</sup> ended, and slavery was declared unconstitutional [by the Emancipation Proclamation<sup>31</sup>], Grandmother Emma said that Grandma Isabelle saw Union soldiers from the North who came into the house and she was afraid of them. The soldiers said to Grandma Isabelle, "Do not worry little girl, we won't hurt you." After the Civil War, Great Uncle Robert remembered where Isabelle was taken and 'went down and took her.'*

*Grandma Isabelle earned money by washing clothes for 'White people' and also she was a midwife. She was very frugal with her money.*

*In 1890, Grandma Isabelle saved enough money to buy a few acres of land in Warsaw, Virginia (which land is still owned by my family today). It is told that Grandma Isabelle, her daughter (my Great, Great, Great Grandma) Mary Ellen could build a house like a man. Grandma Isabelle, who was a tall straight woman, walked with a cane in her later years. She burned to death in 1945 in a fire believed to be set by White people on the land next to hers in Virginia.*

*Grandma Emma, who was raised by her Grandmother Isabelle Newton was born*

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<sup>30</sup> Civil War - The Civil War begins when South Carolina forces, under the direction of General Beauregard, fire on Fort Sumter. The Union commander there, having suffered no casualties but lacking supplies, surrenders on April 13.

<sup>31</sup> Emancipation Proclamation - orders the freeing of the slaves within the Confederacy only taking effect on January 1, 1863.

*in 1894 and lived until September, 1981. She was the oldest in her immediate family and the only one who could read and write – she went to the sixth grade. She also got her beautician’s license to do hair.*

*Some of Grandma Emma’s most joyous times were when she would go to church (Clarksville Baptist Church, which still stands and operates today) everyday with Grandma Isabelle. In fact, she loved going so much, she would cry when she couldn’t go. After church, they would always visit the grave sites behind the church.*

*Grandma Emma would read about William Penn, and she used to dream about living in Pennsylvania. Grandma Emma worked doing ‘a day’s work’ for rich White people in Washington, D.C. She, too, saved her money and, finally, migrated to Pennsylvania.*

*Grandma Emma had seven children in Pennsylvania, but she was very poor. She earned a living there doing day work and ironing clothes. Grandma Mary Ellen used to help Grandma Emma by sending her rabbits and other foods through the mail from Virginia to Pennsylvania.*

– WARSAW, 1997, pp. 29-31

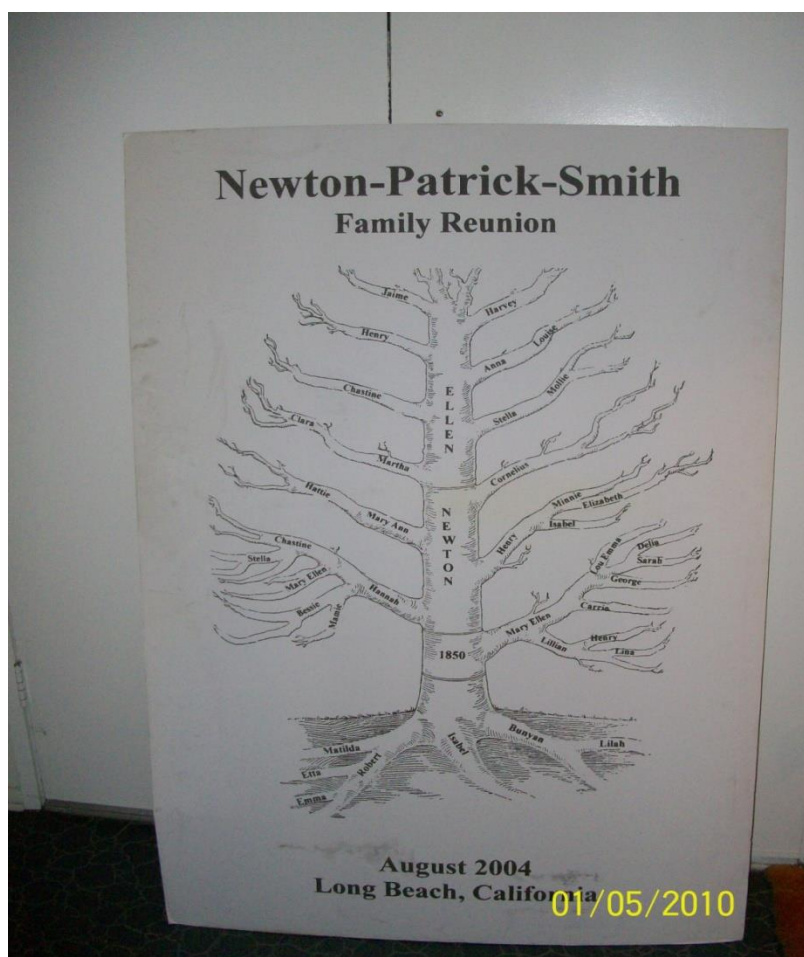
Ron, then, became the griot and took the oral tradition and contextualized it. Specific genealogical facts are at play here as he speaks about his ancestral grandmothers. What resonates is the history, not only of the Newton family; but also, the history of the United States (i.e., the Civil War and slavery, the Emancipation Proclamation, and Union soldiers). The work ethic of his ancestral grandmothers is another important theme. We see a very descriptive quality in Ron’s narrative as he offers an image of Grandma Isabelle’s physical appearance, along with an introduction of the “other” grandmothers, the family’s church and cemetery, Pennsylvania history, and Grandma Emma’s hopefulness and dreams. The migration is an overarching theme in Ron’s narrative. Ron’s written textual story mirrors his Grandmother Bernice and Aunt Marion’s stories discussed previously in this chapter. Although the oral tradition in the Newton family now includes Ron’s textual presentation, also, it reveals the power of stories and storytelling.

*Photographs as Part of the Family Reconstruction  
and Reunification Process*

My aunt, Marion Patrick, also provided many of the photographs utilized in *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book* which further demonstrated how photographs became the text of the racial socialization process, because they provided images of many of the stories passed down in the family. My mother, Bernice Cross and her children hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual/Biennial N-P-S Family Reunion in 2004 at Long Beach, California, where family artifacts were exhibited along with a memoriam listing our ancestors and relatives. A primary photograph (see Figure 1) in the exhibit was the reconstruction of a family tree that my mother learned from a story told by Grandma Emma.

My mother, with the assistance of her grandson Ron, [re]constructed the Newton family tree on a three by four feet piece of White poster board as seen in Figure 1. She utilized the theme of the reunion as the title of the photograph: *Newton-Patrick-Smith Family Reunion*. The three last names indicate Grandma Emma's last names: Newton, her maiden name; Patrick, her first husband's name; and Smith, her second husband's name. Criswell's (2004) research speaks to African American family reunions' and the practice of utilizing two to three family names at these gatherings (p. 1). This is a major theme and fits within the notion of knowledge production through the use of genealogy. Another theme revealed in my mother Bernice's passing information not only follows grandma Emma's tradition of storytelling but connects to hooks' discussion about the use of artifact and self-expression as a family historian and/or storyteller. hooks connects the importance of aesthetics to family reunions to inspire and sustain Black communities by sharing our inheritances. Cousin Viola ("Vi") sent photographs (circa 1940s to 1980s) from Washington, D.C. to my mother Bernice





**Figure 1. Newton-Patrick-Smith Family Reunion**

Cross for inclusion into *WARSAW: The Newton Family History Book*. The photos captured the images of several ancestors and *Elders* of the family.

A photograph (see Figure 2) that was significant because of its intergenerational essence was that of my grandmother's sister, my great Aunt Lina (fourth generation) and my Auntie Lorraine (fifth generation) grandma's middle daughter holding my brother Preston Cross (sixth generation) when he was a toddler.

The picture is both significant and nostalgic because it revealed images I had never seen (i.e., a baby picture of my brother Preston). Later, I used this picture as the cover of a



**Figure 2. The Essence of Family**

calendar entitled, *The Essence of Family* (1999) that included select pictures and biographical information about the *Ancestors*, the *Elders*, the *Offspring* and the *Youngsters*. Bernice Cross and Marion Patrick's story corroborated their first cousin Vi's photographs by sharing some of the stories that my grandmother Emma passed down to my mother and Aunt Marion. Cousins Virginia (Newton) Roberts and Viola Jackson, both of whom were powerful storytellers, further validated the Newton family by providing me with additional stories about our grandmothers Ellen, Isabelle, Mary Ellen, and my grandma, Emma.

Still further, I followed the tradition of my grandmother and mother as I [re]constructed the Newton family photographs for an exhibit in Salt Lake City, Utah at the Utah Cultural Community Center (UCCC). The exhibit ran from January 14, 2010 through March 1, 2010. I

constructed the following personal narrative on a small piece of Black poster board to introduce the audience to the Newton family:

### ***Personal Narrative***

*As a main feature of their family's heritage, the migration theme surfaces in the stories told about the Newtons of Virginia and Pennsylvania, since family stories were told intergenerationally and situated in both temporal and spacial realms. For each generation of the Newtons, stories were told by and about the Grandmothers' virtues that centered on their families. They were strong, insightful women, who knew the power and value placed in a homestead – and set out to pursue "The American Dream." Thus, in the Newton family, Grandma's House is representative of that dream which, in essence, holds each generation together. For instance, each generation spent holidays and summers at their grandmothers' homes. Grandma's House for many of the descendants of Ellen and her daughter Isabelle Newton was the first homestead in Warsaw, Virginia. It is told that Isabelle was frugal and purchased the homestead by saving her money from the wages she earned as a midwife. "Many of her grandchildren lived in the house" (Warsaw, 1997). In subsequent generations, Mary Ellen Newton, the daughter and only child of Isabelle Newton, became the matriarch. The new offspring included Pennsylvanians who were born "beyond the Mason-Dixon Line," which was part of Emma's dream for her offspring. For Emma's children, Grandma's House meant going to "the country" – "the South," Warsaw, Virginia. Although southern culture is vastly different from northeastern culture, the cousins enjoyed the camaraderie of each other when they met, along with Grandma Mary Ellen. The next generation of cousins (many of them born and raised in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania), practically idolized their Grandma (and Aunt) Emma, the northeastern matriarch. Her house was the epitome of family and its relationships. Everyone came to Grandma Emma's house during the holidays, after church for Sunday dinner, birthdays and during the summers.*

*It was not until after Grandma Emma died that the family struggled for almost 20 years to keep her traditions alive and ultimately began hosting family reunions. At the site of the family reunions, stories of our grandmothers are told. A challenge for the storytellers who are descendants of the Elders, is: How does one retell the stories and not dilute the memories of this part of the oral tradition that passes down stories from generation-to-generation? The Newton family wanted to keep the voices of their grandmothers alive to continue to instill the idea of family unity as all of their grandmothers had previously done.*

*At the first family reunion of the Newton clan, the family decided to produce a family history book that symbolizes the notion of Grandma's House. The Newton family hosted its third biennial reunion August 4 to 8, 2000 at the Elk Neck State Historic Park in Great Neck, Maryland. One of the agenda items under the unfinished business section at the family meeting was plans for me to complete the family's history book, Warsaw. The book retells the story of the Newton matriarchs, who for*

*six generations provided the love and support that housed their families, proving to be a critical characteristic in Black family socialization. At the Maryland reunion, the family agreed to unveil their formal history book at the next family reunion in 2002 in New York City, New York. The Newton family history book is still pending and is the subject of my dissertation.*

***Paulette T. Cross  
Ph.D. Student  
University of Utah  
Salt Lake City, UT  
August, 2002***

The text reveals the story of the Newton's as it introduces the family as a viable unit – an institution – that travels across time. The central way in which this happens is through the metaphor of “Grandma’s House,” and speaks to African American women as the central characters in these houses. We see their strength, their virtues, their ambition and their hopefulness. These characteristics are part of faith based belief systems. We see the genealogical connection along with the traditions and rituals of the family that corroborate the section, *Homeplace in Black Poetry* in Chapter 2 of the study. The idea of the family struggling to remain as a unit is proposed, which ultimately led the family towards reconciliation of the situation. Reconciliation occurred in the manifestation and development of major gatherings of the Newton family annually and/or biennially in the form of family reunions. I interrogated the two following photographs as data from the exhibit at the UCCC in the study, *Our Homestead* (Figure 3) and the *Clarksville Baptist Church* (Figure 4).

The family’s homestead (Figure 3.) is located in Richmond County, the village of Warsaw (near Lyells), Virginia. Isabelle Newton bought this land as a result of saving money from the wages she earned as a midwife. The land – a total of 6 to 8 acres – was purchased from the Carter family (good White people) for \$40. (Photograph: circa 1950s – courtesy of Viola Wilson)



**Figure 3. Our Homestead**

“...site of the ancestor . . . The role of the ancestor in Southern sections . . .  
*Is of great significance because it stress(es) the significance of an ancestor,  
or the blood . . . a place where Black blood earns a Black birthright to the land,  
a locus of history, culture . . . a place of birthright . . . a significant  
Influence in the migrant’s life in the North.”*

Who Set You Flowin’? (Farah Jasmine Griffen, 1995)



**Figure 4. Clarkesville Baptist Church**

*“...the Black South’s religiosity . . . provided psychic health for Blacks by assuring them that they would not always be oppressed in the “Egyptland” of the Jim Crow south [but] equipped Southern Blacks with an indigenous belief system for hastening and contributing to their own liberation.”*

Timothy P. Caron (1996)

It is believed that this church is about 200 years old and is told that our family was affiliated with it most of that time. Most of the family who lived in Warsaw went to Clarkesville Baptist Church and are buried in the cemetery behind it on Effel Road, the street where the church is located in Warsaw, Virginia. (Photograph: Circa 1997 courtesy of Phyllis Smith)

As I reconstructed the image of this photograph by adding a U.S. Black historical context to the Newton family history for display, I connected Griffen’s (1995) excerpt to pull in themes surrounding the South, site of place, and the roles of ancestor and kinship. Earlier in the study, I discussed Virginia’s stories which centered the Newton family’s connection to

their ancestors, the land, the family's church and the community. By exhibiting the photographs of the family and their possessions, we instill the family's pride. Pictures become a source of our heritage and live on to become permanent images of the Newton family. Using photographs in this way continues to transmit the stories for posterity.

Similar characteristics, displayed in Hoskins' work such as strength, warmth, tradition, culture and love, emanate from the photograph of the Newton family's homestead. An example of photography functions and is relatable to Sarah Hoskins' homeplace, a documentary photographer, who utilized the art of photography in this manner with her exhibit entitled, "The Homeplace," an ongoing documentary project that centers photographs from historic African Americans. Hamlets in Kentucky's Inner Bluegrass Region. (NPR's Weekend Edition and NPR's Picture Show, April 2010). These characteristics are revealed in the photograph of Clarkesville Baptist Church. The aforementioned picture connects me and my cousin Phyllis' experiences to our visit to Warsaw, Virginia where Phyl photographed the church and cemetery in the rear. Clearly, this visit corroborates Stack's (1996) "return migration theme" which is depicted in Morrison's (1977) novel, *Song of Solomon*. The section on *Ancestors: Homeplace is the Homestead* in Chapter 5 details the data interpretation and analysis of the visit. The aforementioned pictures accompanied others in the UCCC exhibit and were included in the Newton family history book. For the purposes of this section, however, I focus on the idea of photographs and how they function in the study.

I followed a similar process with the second photograph as the first in the replication process. I used Caron's excerpt at the bottom of the photograph to introduce the notion of the Black church and its religiosity – a sociological term referring to degrees of religious



behaviour, belief or spirituality. By utilizing the notion of religiosity as the framework guiding the interpretation of the picture, Clarkesville Baptist Church, we glean the idea of sentimentality and spirituality which is central in the lived experiences of African Americans and in my case study church is central in the lives of the Newtons. Caron (1996) writes in his article, "The Reds are in the bible room": political activism and the Bible in Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*:

Richard Wright [used] literature as a means for discovering the forms of American Negro humanity,"(1) Richard Wright could not help but "discover" the various forms of his own African American heritage. As Ellison has also said, quoting Heraclitus, "geography is fate."(2) While the first volume of Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*, does claim "the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes" and the "cultural barrenness of Black life,"(3) it also catalogues many of the joys and strengths of that same "Black life": the Thomas Wolfe-like lists of beautiful sights, sounds, smells, and sensations of Southern Black rural life; the lyrical catalogues of Black folk beliefs that, like Zora Neale Hurston, he recognized as being vital to African American survival in the racially hostile South; the indomitable will that Wright inherited from his mother; and, perhaps most importantly for Wright as an artist, his imaginative quest through literature for insight into his own lived experience.(4)

This passage connects to the Literature Review section, because it corroborates the necessity of utilizing the humanities as a way towards one's self-definition or self-conception (anti-nihilistic traits) that ultimately develop into self-love and self-caring. This is the idea of African Americans' lived experiences in the South, part of which is connected to the Black church and demonstrates how African Americans' (in this case Richard Wright's) struggled to define their own self-concept, dignity and self-love. It centers geography or place as critical to one's self-development. Caron continues:

It is important to remember that Wright's "geographic destiny" also included a thorough indoctrination into the Black South's religiosity, a fact also documented in *Black Boy*, but often overlooked. His initiation into the symbology of biblical stories and the power of verbally constructed images as taught to him in the Black church formed a vital part of his literary apprenticeship. And while Wright did not embrace the Black church, as an African American from the violently Jim Crow



state of Mississippi, he certainly did recognize the vital role the church played as a bulwark against the tide of White racism in the lives of Southern Blacks; he recognized that African American religiosity provided psychic health for Blacks by assuring them that they would not always be oppressed in the "Egyptland" of the Jim Crow South; and, moreover, he came to recognize the radical potential of the Black church and its ability to equip Southern Blacks with an indigenous belief system for hastening and contributing to their own liberation.(5) The political, revolutionary lessons Wright learned during his affiliation with the American Communist Party (CPUSA) in Chicago allowed him to recognize the revolutionary potential within the Bible lessons he learned from the Black church. The lessons from these seemingly conflicting sources entered into what he once called the "community medium of exchange"(6) of his imagination and were transmuted into the fictive works of *Uncle Tom's Children*. Each of the collection's stories demonstrates either the tragic consequences of life without a church committed to revolutionary politics, or the victorious results of a Christian praxis driven by a Marxist demand for social justice.

Thus, the Black church then provides another source of learning and another instance of *homeplace* (hooks, 1990) where African Americans gathered and became critically conscious about the notions surrounding White supremacy through faith-based belief systems constructed through biblical stories and fiction representative of Black life in the South. There, in the Black church, African Americans learned by example or behavior, having faith and having spirituality.

### *The Importance of Genealogy*

In the following passage, Ron (*Offspring* generation) speaks about the utilization of family reunions as a vehicle to realize the magnitude or macro level of the Newton family:

It's also important sometimes as a family, because more generations are being produced in the U.S., that natural evolution puts you in different geographical areas. When different strains of families reside in different geographical areas, people get caught up into thinking that family is just who you see locally. Family reunions make family a bigger world. So, it's easy for someone out here [on the West coast] to think that family is grandma's (Bernice's) 6 kids and 9 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren. But, family is actually a lot

bigger than that. The entire Newton family is I think Mom you said 122 people. So, the family reunion is about the only venue or formal gathering where you realize that the Newton family is a lot bigger than Bernice Cross' descendants or Ellen Smith's descendants.

— *Focus Group*,  
September 7, 2010, p. 3

Ron alludes to genealogy and centers his discussion on the issue of “place” (Haymes, 1995) and navigating the global society in which we live and how it impacts the Newton family since many strains reside in states across the nation. Therefore, this idea of place intersecting a global society as related to distance and its impact on family gatherings is crucial. I used Haymes (1995), Crichton (1998) and Morrison (1977) in the study to make the connections about place. Further, Ron speaks to the macro level of the family – i.e., the whole family inclusive of all strains. He believes that the event of the family reunion itself is the only venue where the magnitude of the family is realized when all of the other strains of the family are present. Then, and only then, according to Ron, can we imagine the depth of the Newton family.

#### *Family Reunions: Newton Family Voices through the Generations*

When Grandma Emma migrated from Warsaw, Virginia by way of Washington, D.C. and eventually, landed in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, the distance between D.C. and Pennsylvania created a void in the relationships between her siblings and other extended family members. Nevertheless, I remember hearing stories from my mother (Bernice) and Aunt Marion about the family reunion of 1934 when they were young girls. Grandma Emma decided one day to take her children to the country to visit their relatives. She took all seven of her children on the Greyhound Bus, first to Washington, D.C. (the “City”) and then to Warsaw, Virginia (the “Country”). My recollections

corroborated Viola Wilson's, personal account of June 7, 1997 below with my grandma's, my mother's, and my aunt's stories.

*Family Reunion of 1934*

Mama (Carrie Newton Jackson) found Bernice through cousin Elizabeth's father...and that's how she got in touch with Bernice. Elizabeth's father was the one that traced all of you. We didn't know each other until I was about 11 years old. Mama was responsible for us knowing about Aunt Emma's family. Aunt Emma went away to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Mama was the one who found you all. If it wasn't for that we would not know the other family. I remember when it happened. Everyone came to Brooks Court. Everyone stayed together. Slept on the floors and everything. Aunt Emma brought all [of] her children.

– WARSAW, Jackson, 1997, p. 7

Viola credits the reunification of various strains of the Newton family to her cousin Elizabeth's father and her mother (Carrie Newton Jackson). But, her grandma (Isabelle) provided the solid foundation of family values and kinship roles that she experienced and attributed to her frequent visits such as spending the summers in the country. Viola realized the importance of family connections and interactions at a young age. So, the idea of unification was not new in the Newton family. Even though during the years following grandma Emma's death, the family struggled to remain a unit, the idea of unification led to 1997, the family's first formal reunion, gained the interest and excitement from all of the different strains of the family. Presented below are snippets of conversations about the 1997 Newton-Patrick-Smith Family Reunion in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania that formulated a "picture" of the involvement, cooperation, and pride witnessed by various family members about the notion of having a "family reunion."

*Planning the Newton Family Reunion of 1997*

My cousin Lena and I dedicated ourselves to organizing Newton family reunions several times over the decade between 1980 and 1990 without much success. Issues rose surrounding location, format and finances. Nevertheless, the family continued discussing the idea of the family reunion through the years. As a result of the pessimism around the actuality of reunifying, Lena and I bound our relationship with a secret. We made a pact together. We were determined that regardless of how many people attended we would have the family reunion in 1997:

Lena:           We are going to have the Reunion this time if only five people show up.

Paulette:       Well, Lena, I know for sure that Mom [Bernice], Aunt Marion, you, and I will be there.

In our minds, if just the two of us showed up, that would be a reunion. That framed how we have always thought of these formal family gatherings.

Previously, tensions in the family arose over the structure of the family reunion event. Decisions about whether or not the event would be a park or picnic-styled format versus a hotel, a more formal atmosphere, were considered. Because of the family's dissonance, an agreement was not inevitable, and the idea of a family reunion ceased. The notion of a family reunion, in those initial years of planning seemed illusive. However, once the family determined the affirmative, many of the Newton family members "stepped up to the plate" as indicated in the flurry of telephone conversations shown below. Although the following snippets of conversations basically were not lengthy in comparison to the interviews, I believe organized as a collected viewpoint they form the context of the beginnings of an ideal among family members – the possibility of

formal gatherings where everyone in the family participated in one way or another and celebrated the legacy of the Newton family. Cousin Darrell was the first to call, followed by his sister Michelle who telephoned shortly thereafter:

Darrell: Hello. This is Darrell.

Paulette: Oh, hi Darrell. What a pleasant surprise to hear from you!

Darrell: Well, I wanted you to know that I'm available for anything that you need me to do for the Reunion.

Paulette: Thanks, Darrell.

– Darrell, N-P-S Family Reunion,  
August 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

The idea that Darrell loved and cared about the family enough to avail himself for anything that may be needed connects to the characteristics of *homeplace* in which hooks (1990) and other Black feminists and womanists allude.

- ***and his sister Michelle called***

Michelle: I can go to the Ramada Hotel with Lena to check it out. I think it's a much nicer place than Nedoff's or the Spinning Wheel.

Paulette: Oh Michelle, I really appreciate that...

– Michelle, N-P-S Family Reunion,  
August 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

While Michelle did not like the limited selections of sites for the reunion that were the choices presented to the family by the committee, she decided to personally call me, because I was the West Coast representative on the family reunion committee, to speak up against these sites giving the reasons stated above. Michelle used her sense of responsibility and personal accountability to ensure that her voice was heard in giving feedback.

- ***and Lawrence Patrick.***

Lawrence: I wonder what happened to Tiombe? Maybe I should have

called [her]. She might have needed some [financial] help.

Paulette: But Uncle (Lawrence), Tiombe was so excited about coming to the reunion. The last time I spoke to her, she planned to attend.  
 – Lawrence, N-P-S Family Reunion,  
 August 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

The aforementioned passage demonstrated Uncle Lawrence's love and caring for his family, a behavior further modeled by his children, Darrell and Michelle.

- ***and Robert [Bobby] Smith.***

I haven't heard from Maxine and my Grandchildren in Philly; I'm concerned...  
 – Robert, N-P-S Family Reunion,  
 August, 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

Both of my uncles (Lawrence and Bobby) demonstrated the ethics of caring and empathy seen repeated in the aforementioned passages. Occasionally, however, the response to the reunion was not always positive as expressed by my brother Preston.

- ***and Preston Cross***

Thanks for your offer to help me out Aunt Marion, but I just cannot afford a thousand dollars in airfare.  
 – Preston, N-P-S Family Reunion,  
 August 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

Preston declined his aunt's offer for financial assistance to enable him to attend the reunion. Marion, the older sister of Lawrence and Bobby shared a similar empathetic and caring behavior by offering financial assistance to Preston (and others in the family) if necessary. Aunt Marion was known for her generosity and assisted many family members in previous years.

- ***and Ellen Smith***

I guess some of Lena's boys didn't come because they are still mourning...But Sheryl came . . . and Alan, too.  
 – Ellen, N-P-S Family Reunion,

August 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

After Lena's death, Ellen and her sister Bernice filled the void it created by carrying out Lena's unfinished family reunion business. Personal accountability, caring, and responsibility are all prevalent themes in this passage.

- *and William (Bill) Smith*

I have to work, Paulette. I really can't take off; but I'll be there on Sunday.

– Bill, N-P-S Family Reunion,  
August 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

Bill shows personal responsibility and commitment even though he has to work the weekend of the family reunion; he commits to spending time with the family on the last day of the reunion as he plans to attend directly after he leaves his job.

- *and Virginia [Newton] Roberts called*

I'm on too much medication to be so far away from home. I am not going to make it [to the reunion].

– Virginia, N-P-S Family Reunion,  
August 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

- *and Viola Wilson*

Lena's dead...oh my God! Lena's gone. I can't go to the Reunion, I have to get my business straight so I can be ready when the good Lord decides to take me...Lena's dead...uh, uh, uh.

– Viola, N-P-S Family Reunion,  
August 29-31, 1997, Wilkes-Barre, PA

In contrast, Virginia and Viola are unable to attend the reunion each one for different reasons. Both are *Elders* in the family and suffered with illnesses. Many relatives gathered in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania for Lena's funeral which was set days before the family reunion. As family members gathered, there was concern about the tasks that

were left behind:

- Marion: Paulette, we only received 20 R.S.V.P.s.
- Paulette: That's okay, Aunt Marion, people have the tendency to do things at the last minute.
- Marion: But, Paulette I am worried.
- Paulette: When I return to the U.S., I will be prepared mentally and physically to do whatever needs to be done.
- Marion: Oh . . . Paulette!
- Paulette: It'll be okay Aunt Marion.
- N-P-S Family Reunion, August 29-31, 1997,  
Wilkes-Barre, PA

Concerned about the overall success of the reunion, Aunt Marion worried about the attendance factor while I constantly assured her that the reunion would be successful, because of my faith in the family. In all of the aforementioned passages, the unity of the Newton family is a theme, along with love, caring, personal accountability, and many of the characteristics that the scholars utilized in this study name. Most importantly, the theme that resonates overall is collectivity.

*The Newton-Patrick-Smith Family Reunion 1997*

From my earliest years:

I remember the wonderful times we had  
at my Grandma's House  
a place where family tradition  
was central.

Remembrance of ancestors – our GREAT Grandmothers  
their offspring  
children of children  
and grandchildren  
their friends



and friends of friends  
 ALL enjoyed many happy days  
 at Grandma's house

'til the day she died.  
 – WARSAW (1997)

In 1997, my cousin Phyllis and I stood in front of a packed banquet room at the Ramada Hotel in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. It was our very first formal Newton Family Reunion! About 107 people attended – family members from across the country, extended family, and friends. As Phyl and I took turns reading a piece of prose that I wrote about the memories of our grandmother (Emma) seen in the excerpt above, we were a little anxious and intimidated by the size of the crowd. Scared about whether or not the event would be successful. Nevertheless, we got through the moment from the sheer joy and excitement of the occasion and the idea that this is it! The family reunion was actually happening. After all, the planning stages only lasted about 10 years, since 1987 – the family just could not pull it together. Now after all that has been said and done, there is a certain air about the reunion that makes anyone knowing of it wanting to be associated with it. People in Wilkes-Barre came out of the woodwork for it. It did not matter whether or not they recently had been in touch, have never picked up the phone or been very diligent about communicating, or perhaps some even had only fleeting thoughts of certain relatives living clear across the country. Nevertheless, everyone in the Newton family was excited about the event and showed up in groves with their families. Some were unaware of the small registration fee and the fact that dinner reservations were required. Others paid what they could and the individual strains of the family “subsidized” the rest. Overall, there was a general feeling of goodwill, love, and just plain “family.”

I remember that at that reunion 14 years ago, it felt as if we were at grandma's house – just bigger, more extravagant. The grandiose sit-down dinner and all the decorations; the program with live, local jazz musicians that were part of our extended family; the tribute that we had in honor of our ancestors; and even the photograph depicting the family meeting led by my mother where the children were totally engaged by what she was saying. It was a good time! And, we looked like a family that was completely connected to one another.

On the weekend of August 21, 1997, the first N-P-S Family Reunion was held. Since Lena passed away 2 weeks before the Reunion, Michelle replaced her and conducted the family reunion business. Paulette arrived from Mexico to assist her; however, before her arrival sisters Bernice and Ellen had already handled a great deal of the R.S.V.P.s, the monies received, and also developed their own system for recording the receipts. Aunt Marion was supportive to all of the family members who needed financial assistance. The reunion was successful. Over 110 family members and friends attended. The family decided to have a second reunion the following year at the same time and at the same place.

*Use of Personal Narratives and Testimony to [Re]construct*

*Family History: Grandma Bernice's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday*

*Celebration – Lenny's Testimonial*

The setting is my mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Covina, California in February of 2004. The program called for all of the attendants at the party to honor my mother through testimonial – and we did! As I recall, the person whose testimonial was the most profound that day was my nephew Lenny (or "Little Lenny" as we fondly called him when he was a child, since he was named after my

brother, Leonard Jerome Cross). My nephew Lenny talked about the values his grandmother instilled in him and the lessons about life that he learned while he lived with her.

My grandmother was always there for me. I was always getting into trouble and everyone else was against me, but my grandmother was always there for me. I learned so many things from her. I remember when we took the bus from California to Pennsylvania to the first family reunion. Grandma packed food for us to eat for three days. There were a couple of incidents on the bus when we stranded and had to wait for the bus to get repaired. People on the bus complained because they were hungry and wanted to be taken to a food stop. Grandma merely opened her suitcase filled with food and we ate...

– *Testimony/Bernice Cross' Birthday Celebration,*  
February, 2004

This testimony was surprising, since Lenny had been challenged with his “lived experiences” throughout his young life. When his parents separated, he lived with his father, while his sister lived with their mother. Everyone was surprised, yet exhilarated by Lenny’s speech, because his reputation preceded him by far. I believe the general consensus of the family was that he was the person least likely to give such a powerful and empowering testimonial. The notion of the Black grandmother’s role in African American families is central to this text. The tenets of BFW and homeplace assist us with understanding Lenny and the lessons he learned from Grandma Bernice. We see Lenny’s unconditional love for his grandmother in this narrative and connect it to many of the African American grandmothers in the Literature Review section of the study.

As discussed in the Methods Section of the study, the theme of reunification is recognizable in the aforementioned email that Carlos sent to his maternal grandmother Bernice’s strain of the family inviting them to attend a mini-family reunion that he proposed to be held in the city of Las Vegas annually.

*A New Tradition – Carlos' Reunion Project*

*August 10, 2006*

*Dear California Family and Friends,*

*Subject: A New Tradition*

*I am having a family get together at the Sahara Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada from Friday – Sunday, September 29 – October 1, 2006. Aunt Cheri will be in Las Vegas for a mini-class reunion. Since most of the family doesn't get to see Aunt Cheri that often, this would be a good time to see her.*

*This should be a new tradition, because we did this last year with Grandma, Aunt Lisa, Aunt Cheri, Ronald and Telisa. It went really good. By inviting more family and friends, it would be even better.*

*I plan to have a family basketball game included in the following schedule, and I want to play some good basketball; so please bring some friends.*

Carlos was only 14 when he authored this correspondence. In the email, the role of family is a predominant theme, particularly, the roles of “grandmother” and “auntie” and the notion of the family reunion. Unfortunately, Carlos did not rally the family members for a Las Vegas mini-reunion; however, the themes of ritual and tradition resonated in this communication. Up to this time, Carlos had attended every single family reunion and as the email infers, he was influenced by them. Carlos made a noble effort in his attempt to organize a reunion, however, Crichton's (1998) section entitled, “Passing the Torch” and the Diagnostic Chart shed light on the challenges Carlos faced alone in trying to produce a family event. I was the only person he conferred with about the reunion project. Thus, the overarching theme in Carlos' email is caring coupled with personal accountability and personal responsibility. Carlos modeled the behaviors modeled by his grandmother, aunts, and cousins. He internalized messages sent to him

unconsciously about the positiveness of family reunions, and that is the reason he chose to emulate family member reunion organizers. Although the Las Vegas reunion never occurred, it is an impressionable moment in the Newton family *Youngsters'* tradition. Similar themes surfaced in Jonathan's narrative below.

*Personal Narrative as Testimony – Jonathan's Story*

*Jonathan Smith  
April 18, 2006*

*Personal Narrative*

*My favorite family reunion was when we were in California. First, we flew in an airplane. Once there, I stopped in Long Beach. At the beach, I fell into the water which was wet and cold. After a while, we went swimming. When we dried off, my family and I had a cookout. When everyone was nice and full, we had a party. Once at the dancehall, we had dance-offs. We listened to music, too. For a while, we played a little tag and hide-and-seek. My mother and I took lots of pictures and put captions on them for our memories. On our way home, we had to wait two days for the next bus from New York. Still, all-in-all, it was the greatest family reunion ever!*

Jonathan's narrative originated as part of an elementary school classroom lesson plan where the subject of family reunions was part of the school's curriculum. Jonathan, like his third cousins Kendal and Carlos, had attended every family reunion up to this point and similar themes such as family and reunion are common recurrences in his narrative. Jonathan, however, points to the ritual of the event that shows us the daily happenings at the reunion. His lived experiences permeate the moment because he came to know what it means to travel across country, fellowship with West coast family, and encounters with nature where he enjoyed the beach. The format of the Long Beach reunion was

impressionable to this very young man (10 or 11 years) at the time. Themes such as memories, posterity, ritual, family vacations and most importantly, the reunion surface in the narrative.

Both Carlos and Jonathan's narratives are dated 2006, which demonstrates the influence that family reunions have on the *Youngsters*. Prior to these narratives, both of them had participated in family reunions. Both had participated in the 2006 Newton-Patrick-Smith Family Reunion in Salt Lake City, Utah. Further, both participated in the 2004 Newton-Patrick-Smith Family Reunion in Long Beach, California, and Carlos attended a major gathering of the family at his grandma Bernice's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration in Covina, California. So, the internalization of these gatherings is clearly demonstrated in Carlos's proposal to have a family reunion in Las Vegas, Nevada and Jonathan's decision to write about his experience at a Newton family reunion in California.

The text or script of these narratives, clearly suggests (on an unconscious level) that the knowledge production shown has entered another realm that leaves the physicality of the oral tradition as it moves toward contemporary technological methods of preserving oral and written traditions for posterity.

*Passing the Baton<sup>32</sup> to the Youngster's – Lenny Takes Charge*

After the success of the Newton reunion of 2010 when approximately 75 people attended, it was the general consensus of the family that next year's reunion would be successful. But, there was not a reunion in 2011. The *Youngsters* just could not pull it together. As I observed the discussions on *Facebook*, it seemed the committee members were missing in action. The plans seemed disjointed and the *Facebook* discussions were exclusive, because they did not reach the *Elders* and many of the *Offspring* generations who were not affiliated with the Internet. I resigned myself to the fact a family reunion would not happen again for a long time; maybe never. Then, I received a telephone call the beginning of September 2011 from my nephew Lenny that showed the internalization of the African American racial socialization practices and the power of tradition:

Lenny:           Hi, Aunt Cheri.

Paulette:       Hi, nephew.

Lenny:           Aunt Cheri, I was thinking. All of these years you and grandma and the rest of your generations have always given back to the family and did your part. All of you stepped up to the plate and took responsibility for making sure that family reunions happened. Well, Aunt Cheri, I was thinking, it was time that my generation gave back and took charge of things for a change. I have been talking to Cousin Rebecca (Becca) [of Uncle Bobby's

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<sup>32</sup> The idea of reunification – i.e., the Newtons gathering together and recounting past family experiences was the passion of my ancestral grandmothers, particularly Emma. This is significant, because the study is bounded by it. It is the story itself, a nostalgic rendition about the passing down of family stories to future generations. Grandma Emma would have been proud to know that two of the *Youngster* generation, her great grandsons Ronald Nickens and Leonard Cross, would be the ones to take the stories to the next level – from an oral form to a textual one that provided a written record of the family's posterity. Ron is the first male to embrace this role and Lenny the second. For this reason, it was noteworthy to explore the implications that these newer perspectives will have on the Newton family's knowledge-production process.

strain of the family] and she agrees with me and decided to help. Aunt Cheri, do you have Darrell's number? Maybe he can help with gathering the family in Chicago and Nevada. Also, Aunt Cheri, I will talk to Ron about helping out with the West Coast family.

– Telephone Conversation: September 6, 2011

I was flabbergasted! Lenny and I talked for almost an hour, as he formulated the plans for a family reunion next year in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Lenny had been disconnected from the family for the last several years, and for him to pick up the pieces in this manner spoke volumes about his evolution as a responsible citizen and family member. I, as a senior role model, referred him to the *Elders* for guidance so that he would capitalize on their wisdom. I explained that his Grandma and Aunt Marion would be instrumental in the Newton family reunion's success next year. A few days later he called to inform me that he had spoken to Darrell who would be in charge of getting the names and addresses of family in the central United States. Also, my son Ron will not only help to organize the West coast folks, but also create a database for the entire family. Rebecca would be the East coast representative (perhaps with assistance from cousin Helen who headed the reunion committee last year, and because of its success was trying again this year, but the family was unresponsive). What a wonderful reconciliation! After days of feeling hopeless about the *Youngsters'* ability to organize a reunion and carrying their plans out, Lenny's call was a godsend – something that I would not have expected, given the circumstances and the *Youngsters'* track record. But, it happened, and now my nephew Lenny is heading the whole reunion project for 2012.

Lenny's ability to analyze the situation and step up to the plate demonstrates his personal accountability and responsibility and connects to *The Song of Solomon* as well as the BFW tenets of caring, responsibility and accountability, and agency. Lenny



becomes an agent of change. What the aforementioned passage revealed is Lenny's uncanny ability to pull from a knowledge base programmed by his grandma, and perhaps aunts (great and others). First of all, Lenny currently has a 4-year old son and wants to make a difference in his life. Lenny understands his role and importance of family influence in Littlest Lenny's (his son's) life. How Lenny has internalized the lessons he learned from his grandmother and other family members will be passed down to Littlest Lenny so that he will be adept in navigating society. The overarching theme in Lenny's passage is the tradition of family reunions and what he has learned from the many reunions that he attended. His close relationship particularly with Becca along with other East coast cousins stemmed from connections they made at family reunions as they grew up.

Chapter 6 revealed the Black racial socialization process and practice of knowledge production – the lessons we learned at Black family reunions and the overarching themes the research uncovered corroborated the voices of the Newton family members across generations. Six prevailing themes involving the racial socialization at Black family reunions surfaced: 1) traits, 2) functions, 3) structure, 4) site, 5) rituals and/or traditions, and 6) family as an institution and/or community. Voices across the generations in the data sampling used found that the participants overwhelmingly believed in the notion of family reunions even when the event itself was unsuccessful or never realized. Within the dynamics of the structure it was found that tensions arose around issues in planning the family reunions, participation and passing the reunion organizing onto the next generation.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of my research study was to examine the resistance approaches African American families used to connect members and groups to the historical struggle for equality in the United States. As the researcher, utilizing a bounded case study in “writing lives” of my ancestral grandmothers and their *homeplaces*, I used a collection of intergenerational stories provided by family members. I believe the study will be a model for Black families to write about their family histories in a scholarly manner in the future. As Bell-Scott (1994) stated, the act of writing the lives of my ancestral grandmothers and my family honors nameless [females] while it encourages other generations to write for self-knowledge, empowerment, and posterity (p. 18). Thus, the study connects Hale’s (1982) work of the last century about the distinctive cultural practices of African American families that aims to prepare individuals to effectively resist, cope with, and combat White racism to more contemporary issues in the 21st century in which Taylor and James (2005) present complexities of the changing dynamics of African American families. As Lee and Slaughter (1995) stated, I, as educational researcher bring my research to show practices such as *pedagogies of the Black home* to reflect cultural paradigms which emphasized cultural solidarity, education for self-reliance in Black communities, and alternative ways of gaining cultural knowledge,

practices and values centering the history and the contemporary African American experience to foster the successful education of African Americans.

I reflected on the experiences within my own family that measured as unsuccessful in the dominant culture: many of my son's generation did not graduate from high school, many of them hardly recognize African American heroes, and as some of the participants discussed, most of the *Youngster* generation are completely assimilated into mainstream America unencumbered by how that impacts the future of African Americans. I remembered when the family gathered and discussed our history how animated the children were in learning about their genealogy. The pride they exhibited pushed me further to examine and make connections to the nihilistic nature and low self-esteem that assimilation conveys and perpetuates. Thus, I reasoned that a study that connects all of these issues would inspire the next generation of African Americans to take interest in their family traditions, histories and education.

### *Summary of Research Findings*

Chapter 7 summarized how the humanities (via literature) manifests in the homeplace, the racial socialization practices that are learned in the home, and the way in which each of these components are connected to the African American family reunion. I summarized these components in three categories, which I referred to as the *three Rs*: resilience, resistance and reconciliation.

### *Resistance*

Homeplace as a “site of resistance” was an important construct of the study. hooks (1990) demonstrated just how important homeplace was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – a place where African Americans could heal themselves (pp. 171-172). However, an evolution occurred during the latter part of the century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. I found that the symbol of homeplace represented an oxymoron. On the one hand, it represented a safe space for African Americans; but on the other hand, the data showed unsafe spaces in the same environment. Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* reveals the unsafeness of homeplace in the scene where Sophia confronts Celie about fighting men all of her life. Interviews with the *Youngsters* corroborate the unsafe times in which they live currently. Themes such as caring and empathy, therefore, seem fuzzy in a 2011 context. Although caring and empathy are the operatives here, they certainly look differently than they did for early 20<sup>th</sup> century Black families. How assimilation played into the whole scheme is a large factor in the discussion. Thus, African American family reunions are another construct here that functioned as a “community of resistance” (hooks, 1990, p. 42) and recaptured our history of the past and nurtured Black families as homeplaces did in the past. I argued in the study that Black family reunions are a reality where contemporary African American families reunify and renew their spirits (hooks, 1990, p. 47).

I utilized theories, literature/stories and African American family reunions throughout the study to demonstrate how the resistance approaches of Black families connected to the historical struggle for equality for African Americans in the United States. The study showed the distinctive cultural practices of African American families

that prepare individuals to effectively resist White supremacy, particularly as experienced by the Newton family.

Using Haymes' (1995) work, I provided perspectives of decolonization framed in pedagogies of place. I showed alternative knowledge bases in order to raise consciousness about how the Newton family and other Black families comprehend deficiency-based language and its relationship to homeplaces in the U.S and how they became "specific examples of local resistance" (Baker, 1997). Also, I analyzed the myths and images associated with Black families, urban life, and processes of gentrification through a family history approach centering stories and storytelling.

*Homeplace* (hooks, 1990) provided a framework of resistance efforts formulated in homes, and through it, I discussed the Black female political consciousness via the African American scholar/researcher extending the education process within the homes. Within this context emerged *pedagogies of the Black home*, an informal knowledge-based system that critiques the dominant system as it continues to teach African Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century they must "become twice as good" as Whites in order to be successful. In this light, the next generation can continue hooks' (1990) tradition and truly resist assimilation.

Within the construct of the humanities that included the African American literature used in the study, the three significant themes that surface are intergenerational knowledge transmission (hooks, 1990; Morrison, 1977; Walker, 1987; Wright, 1940), resistance (Angelou, 1969; Walker, 1987; Wright, 1940), and the idea of the Black family and its kinship relations as an institution of empowerment.

Thus, the study provides an ontological view about the importance of education, including the *duality of socialization*, or the coping strategies necessary for survival. Most importantly, resistance shows how formal educational practices at home function to disrupt the stereotypes, myths, and other misnomers about African Americans.

### *Resilience*

I used *resilience* in the study more specifically alluding to the term *racial resilience* which infers a particular process of racial socialization, identification and reverberation that African Americans and other people of color utilized. In other words, racial resilience was a combination of racial socialization, racial identification and coping mechanisms. The study, then, connects *homeplace* as an ideal to our ancestral past. *Grandma's house* was a particular space where knowledge production, specifically racial resilience and the practice of Black racial socialization occurred and is internalized within Black families. Thus, hooks' theorization provides evidence that, indeed, homeplace validates the African American family as an informal Black institution where knowledge about racial resilience prevails.

The findings center the participants' stories about their families which offer some insight into Black race socialization practices in the home and racial resilience which connect to Black family reunions.

Based on the findings of this study, family relations are challenging in contemporary times, so family members must put effort into cultivating relationships and working on racial resilience in order to prevent even more stresses in their everyday experiences.

### *Reconciliation*

When all is said and done, the beauty of a tightly-knit family unit is representative in the idea of forgiveness. Forgiveness in African American families, particularly the Newtons, is shown in many untraditional ways. How does the Newton family and various other Black families reconcile differences among family members? The study discussed many nuances surrounding family issues: incontrovertible situations in which one does not have any control such as one's birthright, the genesis of miscommunications, the notions about silences, issues surrounding death, divisions in the family, and the problems encountered in caregiving – all are of a controversial nature and certainly occur in most families. Nevertheless, the family continues to exist and life goes on. This is part of the human condition; it is uncontrollable. Regardless of the situation, there is a story attached to it that someone knows of and the story continues to be passed down through the generations. Part of the socialization process is that the future generations “get it” through the stories that are told. Therefore, family reconciliation is critical, because it is grounded in spirituality, forgiveness and caring. As discussed in the Literature Review section of the study, reconciliation is a major theme in Black culture. Reconciliation stems from African American's religious background, which may or may not include organized religion. The centrality of U.S. African Americans' spirituality is the foundation of African religiosity coupled with Christianity. Christian religion, as ideology, came into existence during slavery and evolved into many denominations. Thus, even with the evolution of religiosity, African American families still have that spiritual grounding, which is a commonality of who we are as Black people.

For many African Americans, differences are reconciled in various ways such as

the two reconciliations illustrated in the study (Chapters 6 and 7). In this chapter, I have concluded the study with Reconciliation # 2, *Santa Was a Woman* (see the Appendix) which pays homage to the *Elders*. In Chapter 6, I concluded it with Reconciliation #1, entitled *Passing the Baton to the Youngsters – Lenny Takes Charge* which pays homage to the *Youngsters’* generation. Although on many occasions, circumstances are left unresolved in the family, somehow, reconciliation took place. This is the case with the characters in the story *Santa was a Woman* (in the Newton family). As the researcher in the study interrogating the issue of silence and how it plays out in the Newton family, I did not have any idea that the relationship between me and a beloved relative in the story could ever fracture; I was very close to this relative. Now that it has come to pass, I have resigned myself not to fret and worry about my acceptance. I reminisced about this story often, and thus it keeps me steady. It sustains me. It makes me happy and has been a source of pride and happiness most of my life when I think about this relative. As I reflected on the formulation of this unusual type of reconciliation, I attributed it to how my mother and grandmother socialized me. Both of them believed that no matter what occurs in one’s life, one should not continue to hold grudges. Forgiveness is, by far, the overarching theme of family because as we detail the history of family, we ascertain the loving, caring and compassion many of the members demonstrate by their actions through the course of one’s life. As family members, we must always care about each other and enact a similar, positive behavior that exhibit love and compassion. It is not important that relationships fracture, the importance lies in how we pick up the pieces and forge on.

I do not see my beloved relative much, but I have reconciled the situation through



this story, and I have continued to live with my decision. The emotion that I consume is part of a Black feminist, womanist consciousness, constructed by my ancestral and contemporary Black grandmothers, and of course, my mother. For them, the family unit is the operative mandate. Within family ideology is a model of expectations delineating how each member should pursue meaningfulness from the family. As the cycle of the family continues, each generation learns the lessons of the past and carries them forward. On many of those occasions the messages are positive. Sometimes, however, the messages are very often negative.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

My bounded case resulted in 3 themes that were representative of the Newton family: resistance, resiliency and reconciliation that I recommended for further study:

1. Conduct more qualitative studies using African American families and their stories to validate the findings in this study.
2. Conduct replications of the study nationally using African American families to confirm similarities and differences throughout various regions of the United States.
3. Frame studies using resistance, racial resilience, and reconciliation as it pertains to African American families in the United States.
4. Conduct studies using *pedagogies of the Black home* and its impact on African American families.

### *Conclusions*

The women, men, girls and boys in this study were/are Newton family members. Regardless of their various family experiences, they maintained that their African American family values were important. However, some of the participants believed that the idea of family can be especially challenging, whether or not it was during the Jim Crow era or in the “so-called” post-racial environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the changing times, functions, and roles of the Black family revealed a complexity that is beyond superficiality. Additionally, in 1 or 2 of the participants, we see the emergence of personhood as they begin to negotiate their own individual values and beliefs into their family mores, particularly, as it relates to assimilation (White supremacy). Overall, the participants shared their successes and struggles as testimonies that could be incorporated into cutting-edge theories about Black families to foster the advancement of successful African Americans who can ably navigate predominantly White societies.

The following are my conclusions for this study:

1. From an institutional perspective, the Newton family would benefit from a kinship network that functioned to better mentor the *Youngsters* generation both in and outside geographic locations of their homeplaces. Moreover, it is important that African American families create and sustain effective relationships with open communication to the family members, for instance, utilizing the Black family reunions as vehicles to further communication.
2. Personal accountability is key in Black family racial socialization, particularly; an accounting that encompasses self-reflexivity about what it means to be personally responsible as a member of the family cutting across

generations, regions, and socio-economic status within the family. Most participants speak about personal accountability either directly or indirectly. In each case, participants recalled and continued to cherish family from a wide spectrum of relationships of those whom invested in them. An underlying theme was reciprocity.

3. Familial characteristics that contributed to the successful functioning of the Newton families included belonging and concern, sense of family identity, and strengthening values (Crichton, 1998).
4. Remaining true to one's family is another key theme. It is important to embrace and maintain a sense of self in terms of family identification. Based on the findings of this study, family relations are challenging in contemporary times, so family members must put effort into cultivating relationships and working on racial resilience in order to prevent even more stresses in their everyday experiences. Participants' contentment about their families were facilitated by their awareness, appreciation, and overall protective functions provided by their families' homeplaces.
5. Participants were conscious of an evolution of caring across generations that functioned as a tradition in the Newton family. In several cases, participants did not understand why they cared other than because caring was given to them. They, in turn, felt that it was incumbent upon them to act accordingly. The "caring" piece is part of BFW thought theories and is critical in maintaining balance and productivity in their homeplaces.

From the 5 categories drawn above, an underlying theme revealed that Black families

function at an institutional level in the Newton family and serve an instrumental role in family [re]unification. While there is a need to incorporate specific ways that family members can restore race socialization and racial resiliency practices, effective ways in which kinship networks can be incorporated, and assess ways to cultivate family relationships would enhance Black families' growth and development in the contemporary era.

## **APPENDIX**

### **SANTA WAS A WOMAN**

## **SANTA WAS A WOMAN**

*We were poor as church mice that winter of 1952 on Lincoln Street – dirt poor! Mommy was sitting in the chair by the coal stove keeping warm. We kids played on the floor near her. Mommy looked sad. I could tell something was on her mind, but I didn't know what.*

*You couldn't tell by looking at the three of us, Peaches, Preston and I, that we were poor though. Mommy kept us as clean as Spic 'n Span. Preston always looked like a little man dressed in his pants and shirts. Mommy dressed Peaches and I like twins, since we were only 11 months apart. Our hair was always kept up, because she was a beautician. She did all the colored peoples' hair in town. That's how she earned money to feed us.*

*But this Christmas Eve, there was something on Mommy's mind. You could tell by the way she was sitting there by the heat from the coal stove. She moved restlessly and stared right at it.*

*"Kids." She called out.*

*"Yes, mam." We answered in unison.*

*"Please come over here; there's something I must tell you."*

*"Yes, mam." We cried out in unison, again.*

*We kids immediately moved from playing with our toys to an area closer to her.*

*"Santa will not be coming to our house this year, because I do not have any money to leave him," she announced.*

*"But, Mommy, what if we pray and pray and pray. Then, will Santa come?" I asked.*

*"You can pray," Mommy said, "it always helps; but it's Christmas Eve and since I do not have the money for Santa, kids, there is a possibility that he may not come to our house."*

*"Oh, but Mommy," Peaches said, "we will write Santa a note and beg him to stop by our house . . ."*

*" . . . and we will leave him milk and cookies," offered Preston, "like we always do, okay Mommy?"*

*With her help, we conjured up a note to Santa telling him that we were good kids all year and to please leave us some toys for Christmas.*

~~~~~

*Meanwhile, in The City far away, Auntie spent the evening working late.*

*"Miss," said her boss, "didn't you say that you had some nieces and nephews in Pennsylvania?"*

*"Seven to be exact," said Miss, "two girls and five boys."*

*Miss was an accountant for a toy manufacturer and was working late on Christmas Eve, when her boss approached her with some toys he thought she could take home to her nieces and nephews.*

*"Here are some toys for the kids, Miss. I hope they will enjoy them," her boss said.*

*There were many wonderful toys. Roy Rogers and Gene Autry cowboy outfits, including ten gallon hats, fringed vests, and even the stirrups. There were guns, too, shiny silvery ones with Black holsters for the boys.*

*"Thanks a lot Guy," Miss replied.*

*"There's more. How about these two colored walking and talking dolls. They are new this year, and they stand three feet tall," said Guy.*

*"Ooooooh!," Miss marveled, "Cheri and Peaches will love these."*

~~~~~

*It was near midnight when Miss finally left The City by bus to Wilkes-Barre with all of the Christmas presents. She was tired and dozed all the way. She was jolted awake suddenly when the bus came to an abrupt stop. She could not believe that she was in Wilkes-Barre already. She thought to herself, "I must have slept all the way." In the taxi on the way to Grandma's house, she suddenly thought that instead of giving the toys to B's kids at Christmas dinner, that maybe she should stop by her house and leave the kids their presents. Billy, Lionel and Larry her other nephews are already at Grandma's house.*

*As Miss approached B's house at 4:00 a.m., she noticed there was a light shining through the window. She thought to herself, "B must still be up preparing for Christmas." After she paid the taxi driver and he unloaded the cab, Miss knocked on the door. Her sister, B opened it, and was very surprised to see her with all the packages.*

*"Oh Miss—what are you doing here so early?" B said.*

*"Well, I was on my way to Mama's when I thought maybe I should stop by here first and leave these presents for the kids," she replied. My boss gave me some toys for the kids.*

*I thought it would be better to leave them now rather than giving them to the kids tomorrow like I usually do."*

*"Thank you Lord," B mumbled aloud. "Jimmy's not here, and I do not have any money. I already explained to the kids that Santa would not be coming to our house."*

*"Gee whiz, B, I am glad I decided to stop by," Miss exclaimed, "maybe I should leave the kids their clothes, too."*

*"O.K.," Mommy replied.*

*"What about a tree B? While you are getting the packages together, I am going to run out and look for a tree," Miss stated.*

*On the way out of the door, Miss bumped into Uncle Bob, Daddy's older brother who was coming to Mommy's house to give her some money for the kids for Christmas. They left together, found a Christmas tree and brought it back to our house. Uncle Bob also slipped Miss \$20.00 to give to Mommy to help out. "*

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*By the time Miss returned with the tree, Mommy had put up the Christmas decorations, and together they put the bulbs and lights on the tree. When Miss left, Mommy was organizing the presents under the tree around the Lionel train set.*

*Later that morning when we kids awakened . . .*

*"Mommy, Mommy. Look Mommy!" exclaimed us kids in unison.*

*"Santa did come and he left me a Roy Rogers cowboy suit," Preston shouted excitedly.*

*"Oh, Mommy," called Peaches, "come look at our walking and talking dolls."*

*"They're colored," I said. "Oh, Mommy . . . they're beautiful!"*

*"God heard our prayers Mommy, and he sent Santa to our house anyway," Peaches smilingly said, "'cause we prayed and prayed."*

*"And we left Santa the note," Preston said.*

*"It's because we were good kids, huh Mommy," I suggested.*

*"We were good for most of the year."*

*"Mommy, Mommy, look – Santa left us new clothes, they're so pretty . . ."*

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*Mommy and us kids walked to Grandma's house for Christmas dinner. It was cold and snowing, but we didn't mind because we were warm. Mommy dressed us in our old Sunday coats, but everything else we had on was new, from the shiny Black leather shoes and White silk socks, to the turquoise taffeta dresses with the pretty little Black and White striped ruffled inserts in back of the skirt that stuck out from all those petticoats underneath to the pearl necklaces around our necks. We were little princesses. Well, at least we looked and felt like ones anyway. You'd never know we were poor. My brother Preston, the little man that he was, headed the troop like a scout master making sure all was well ahead of us so that nothing would harm his family.*

*When the family arrived at Grandma's house, it was bustling with excitement, because it seemed all of our relatives were there and they were talking to each other all at once. That's what was so much fun about being at Grandma's house – seeing all of the people, listening to all of the talking, and especially hearing those wonderful sounds of laughter.*

*"Look, Auntie," I said. "isn't my dress pretty?"*

*"Yes, love," Auntie said with a certain glitter in her eyes.*

*"Oh, Auntie," Peaches said excitedly, "we didn't think Santa was coming to our house because Mommy didn't have any money to give to him, but he came anyway because we prayed to God and we left Santa a note."*

*"Wonderful, wonderful," Auntie squealed with glee.*

*"Santa left us toys and clothes," Peaches and I happily cried out (in unison, like twins).*

*"I am so glad you all are having such a wonderful Christmas," stated Auntie.*

*Years later, I would learn the story about this wonderful Christmas from both my Mother and my Aunt. Its significance could only come later in life when I would truly understand its meaning and could be thankful.*

*You see, even though my family struggled to survive when we were young (until Mother started working for the Federal government). I never knew how poor we were because she always managed to provide her children with formal meals, including dessert after*

*dinner. We took life for granted then. Mommy was always there for us or Grandma or our Aunties. These women made sure everything was in order for their kids. So, that year in 1952, we were blessed with a wonderful Christmas like all of those before and after. Dressed in our new Christmas clothes, we were like models prancing down a great runway on display for the world to see.*

*Yes, those were the days when life was easy and carefree as kids should have in their childhoods. We believed deep down in our hearts that Santa would come to our house, and we would have another happy Christmas. But what we did not know was that our Santa was a woman that year; our Aunt always helped my mother make the holidays even more special. When I think about it, in our house, Santa was always a woman!*



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